Acknowledgments

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Thank you.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work, which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Greg Thompson
Abstract for *Swings and Round-Abouts: Discourses of Connectedness in Secondary Schools.*

Greg Thompson

Connectedness is a complex idea that seems to mean different things for each individual. For the purposes of this dissertation, connectedness can best be understood as the ways that an individual feels an affiliation with the community of the institution that he/she experiences. This dissertation seeks to uncover the discourses that various stakeholder groups have within the site of a single school concerning connectedness. One of the precepts that this dissertation holds is that connectedness to school has benefits for the individual as learner, the school as a community and potentially the wider community in years to come. This is a theoretical position in the lineage of such theorists as Plato, Rousseau, and Dewey who have argued that education is a transformative practice that could be a tool in solving some of the issues that contemporary societies face.

To examine the issue of connectedness, focus group research was chosen as the most beneficial methodology, as it allowed the stakeholders to explore their understanding of connectedness in small groups of their peers. It was important that the students in particular were allowed to develop their discourses of connectedness, as they were at the centre of the converging and diverging discourses. For this reason there were four student focus groups. The students selected for each of the student focus groups were targeted because of particular characteristics. They were purposively sampled to examine how, if at all, these discourses changed if the student was a high achiever, a quiet student, a student committed to the co-curricular programme of the school or a student who had been in regular trouble with the school hierarchy. There were also two parent focus groups, two staff focus groups, and a focus group made up of members of the school council.

The contributions of the various focus groups were analysed in the light of the work done by the French theorist Michel Foucault concerning the institution and the way that it deploys discursive practices to govern and regulate the subject. A number of his ideas that have been particularly important in this work. Foucault’s power, discourse and governmentality have informed the analysis of the data and have supported the conclusions drawn. The key finding of this dissertation is that discourses of connectedness are crucial in determining how students feel about their schools. Many of the stakeholder groups hold diverging expectations of what connectedness is. These findings, and others, have implications for the management of schools in Western Australia.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Research Context

At the end of 2001 I was completing my second year of teaching at “Church College” when some perplexing news was delivered to the teaching staff. Four of the 31 Year Eleven students had made a decision to leave Church College and continue their education at other schools. Normally, the movement of students in high school is one of the realities of teaching secondary students. However, given the relative size of "Church College's" Year Eleven cohort, four students represented a significant percentage of those students completing Year Eleven. As well as this, Year Eleven seems a strange time for students to leave a school particularly since all of the students had been at Church College since Year Eight, the inaugural year of the College. By the end of Year Eleven I assumed that the students felt quite connected to Church College, the institution in which they were about to undertake the pressure-cooker atmosphere of TEE Year Twelve.

What really made me start to think was the timing of their transfers. In secondary schools, it is not unusual to lose students at the end of Year Ten to pursue apprenticeships or job opportunities. Australia-wide, 93.6% of 15 year-olds attended schools while only 61.6% of 17 year-olds attended schools in the year 2000.² There is, however, little research into the numbers of students changing schools in their secondary years or as to why these changes take place. Church is a unique institution set up with strong commitments to both community and participation. It seemed

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¹ In this dissertation every effort has been made to protect the identity of the school, the staff, parents and students. For this reason aliases have been used in place of names. “Church College” and “Church” are pseudonyms used to protect the anonymity of the College. The names of suburbs have also been withheld in the interests of protecting the anonymity of the participants. The participant pseudonyms were chosen by the participants themselves.

² Australian Bureau of Statistics, [Website] 4221.0 Schools Australia http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs…/ Date accessed 06/10/02
strange that these students would be leaving at such a crucial time in their education at this time without an apparent reason. When I spoke to the four students, I also discovered that they were all going to choose subjects that Church College offered. Why were they leaving then?

I thought about it for some time and realised that I really did not understand why students stayed at particular schools at all. At about this time I went to a conference that looked at the contemporary problems that educators face in the schooling of boys. The conference was called *It’s Not Easy Being a Guy.* One of the presenters, Professor Carr-Greig spoke about boys in education and one of the things that he said was that boys need to ‘connect’ with their environment. This made excellent sense to me. However, I thought about it more and realised that three of the four students leaving the school were female and was sure that issues of ‘connecting’ to a school would be an issue to students no matter their gender. Furthermore I still had little idea as to what connected students to their schools.

Further thought led me, as I imagine it does for so many educational researchers, to my own experience of schooling. Why did I stay at the same school for the five years of my secondary schooling? To be honest, I was an indifferent student for most of my time there, and all of my formal reports reflect a disaffection with the classroom environment. Yet, I honestly believe that I felt a part of the community of that school. Why? I didn’t really know. Maybe it was my peers, my teachers, and maybe my own family or perhaps it was some mix of these or other variables. On further reflection, I realised that if I asked the different stakeholders in my education, other students, teachers, parents and members of the school governing body, why I stayed at this school, I would probably get very different answers.

As a result of this thinking, I envisaged a student-centred study that would investigate the various discourses of connectedness within the site of a secondary school and begin to uncover what the students’ thought connected them to their school community. I also wanted to understand what other key stakeholders understood to

---

3 *It’s Not Easy Being a Guy*, Meerlinga Foundation, Sheraton Hotel, November 19-20 2001
be the things connecting these students to their school and how these understandings compared and contrasted to the things reported by the students. Through this investigation I hoped to begin to understand some of the varying discourses in operation that bear on how students connect their schools.

**Connectedness and Its Relevance**

Experiences of connectedness are significant in that they are central in helping students to become critical and effective members of society. It is through experiences of feeling connected that people are able to engage and become part of their larger social world. Crucial to this is some understanding that education is a transformative force in the lives of students, a perspective developed by various theorists ranging from John Dewey writing in the early twentieth century to Peter McLaren’s contemporary writing. In a world where there are increasing challenges for the global community to work together to solve potentially catastrophic issues, I agree that it is reasonable to expect schools to play an important part in equipping students to deal with these current and future problems. The dilemma is, however, that students who are alienated from school communities are probably less likely to be capable of engaging with both particular local and larger global issues. It is also my assumption that a person’s ability to address these issues is developed through their experiences of local communities.

Important to this research is a range of questions. What are the students saying about their connection to their school community? How do they articulate their feelings of either connectedness or alienation? How is this articulation endorsed or challenged by other key stakeholders such as staff, school council and parents? As organising questions that will premise the dissertation, an attempt will be made to understand how different groups articulate their shared or competing discourses of connectedness, both within and between these groups of school stakeholders.

The concept of ‘community’ in schools and how it is articulated is central to this investigation. Part of the framing of this study will be how different educational theorists have expressed their views on community and connectedness to school as experienced by students. The post-structural analysis of Foucault and his work on
multiple discourses and governmentality within institutions will be important when looking at the different discourses of connectedness operating within a school. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault writes about institutions as:

\[
\text{[N]ot the ‘centre of power’ not a network of forces but a multiple network of diverse elements (…), a strategic distribution of different natures and levels.}^4
\]

This is significant because it looks at how institutions such as schools can be understood through an investigation of the various discursive practices in operation within these institutions. Furthermore, institutions are perhaps best not seen as centres of power. More useful in understanding these institutions is how various discourses have been used or ‘deployed’ by different groups within institutions. Through such work significant understandings of the power/knowledge nexus operating within these structures can be developed.

There has been much attention focussed on the issue of ‘connectedness’ in contemporary educational thought. For example, Paul Cooper writes:

\[
\text{[S]chools must provide opportunities to all of their students to be identified, both by themselves and others, in terms of the positive qualities and their potentialities for making a constructive personal contribution to their communities.}^5
\]

The significance of this, he argues, is that students who do not feel valued or connected to their school often exhibit negative social behaviour. This will almost certainly bear on students’ life chances beyond their schooling years.

The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate the various discourses that emerge from different stakeholders within a school community: students, staff, parents and the school council. These discourses will be analysed for the way that they diverge and converge within the school community. It is assumed that when there exist

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disparate discourses of connectedness the result can be a disruption to key educational practices and functions within the school community.

This research will focus on one school. This will enable the research to represent some of the multiple experiences of connectedness contained at one site. This will provide an opportunity to begin to understand important things about discursive practices operating within schools. This dissertation not only seeks to develop an understanding of how the various articulations of connectedness within one particular site of discourse are experienced, but also to give voice to different groups’ discourses of connectedness within that site.

The Site – Church College

The school chosen is Church College, a relatively new Uniting Church school situated in the urban fringe of Suburb X, Western Australia. Church is a K – 12 school that has been operating since 1997. The school currently has around 500 students and it continues to grow. In 1998, the school experienced some notoriety within the community when the Foundation Principal was removed and was replaced by another. This was done with a resultant backlash within the community, a decline in student population and a decrease in community opinion of Church College. Gradually the school has reversed the decline in population. Currently, the school is experiencing around 15% growth in student population each year.

The drawing area for the school population is predominantly from Suburb X and Suburb Y, approximately 40 kilometres from Perth. This area has the following demographic characteristics. There are approximately 97,500 people in the area, of which 85% are Australian citizens. The region is defined as being of low to medium socioeconomic status, with 23% of the population holding tertiary qualifications. It is expected that the population of the region will grow by about 30% by 2006. Housing prices are low, although there has been a recent surge in prices as the Freeway access

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6 KIEP Schools and Demographics, [Website] http://www.kiceeiiec.com/schools/html Date Accessed 06/10/02
7 Ibid.
to Suburb X has made it more attractive to people commuting to the city. The REIWA (Real Estate Institute of Western Australia) estimates that the average housing price for Suburb X in July 2002 was $133,000. This represented a growth of 16.3% over the previous twelve months. In Suburb Y the average housing price was $82,181, representing an increase of 6.4% over the previous twelve months. This figure would seem to support the status of the suburban areas as one of low-medium socioeconomic status given that the average housing price in Western Australia is $171,800. The youth unemployment rate for the area is approximately 11.1%, whilst the overall unemployment rate is 10.5%. This represents a significantly lower youth unemployment than the national average of 20.5%, whilst the overall unemployment rate for the area is higher that the national average of 6.5%. Of the 15% of the regional population who are not Australian citizens, 5% speak a language other than English at home. 2% of the population are Aboriginal. Traditional heavy industry is the main employer in the area along with growing industries such as shipbuilding and hi-tech industries.

There are eight high schools in the area, of which four are Education Department Senior High Schools. The other schools in the area are religious denominational schools that have Baptist, Catholic, Lutheran and Uniting Church affiliations. Church College is affiliated with the Uniting Church. Church College is a K-12 school that exists as three separate schools. Firstly, there is the Primary School, run by a Head of Primary. The Head of Primary is also the Deputy Principal of the college. The Primary School caters for Years One to Six. Secondly, there is the Middle School, which encompasses Years Seven to Nine. The Middle-School Coordinator runs the Middle School. Thirdly, there is the Senior School, which encompasses Years Ten to Twelve. The Coordinator of Pastoral Care, and the Curriculum Coordinator jointly control the Senior School. Whilst all of these schools

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8 Ibid.
10 Ibid. This value was determined by adding the suburbs of T,U,V and W together and dividing by four.
11 REIWA Op Cit.
12 Kiep, Op Cit.
13 ABS Op Cit.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
are run separately, with separate discipline procedures, and often completely separate teaching staff, there is also a lot of cross-over between the schools. For example, at Church a traditional House system is operating as a form of pastoral care. Whilst this House system operates from K-12, the Primary School is a separate entity from the Middle and Senior Schools that operate together.

Church College’s Vision Statement is important as it codifies the values and attitudes that underpin the institution and its community. A discourse analysis of this document will provide a useful context for beginning to look at how the College values its students connecting to the school. The opening sentences that are in a bold typeface in the text of the Vision Statement read as follows:

Church College is building an accessible and inclusive community in which students are educated to discover and realise the excellence within themselves.

Within the values of the Uniting Church in Australia, it is developing people of conscience who play a responsible role in creating sustainable compassionate communities.17

It is interesting that the Foundation Council and Executive developed a vision for the school as being instrumental in educating individuals who are able to “play a responsible role in creating sustainable, compassionate communities.” This tacitly underscores “Church College's" interest in its students feeling connected to the larger social world.

One of the other things that really stands out about the Vision Statement is the importance placed on recognising and developing individuals that are able to become autonomous agents of change in a complex world. The vision Statement reads:

Church achieves these goals by:

Developing the skills that will enable the students to be agents of change, team thinkers, life-long learners, and innovative and critical thinkers.18

17 Church College “Vision Statement and Goals” in Church College Handbook, Baldivis 2002
18 Ibid.
When analysing this document, it is quite evident that the institution sees itself as a progressive, liberal institution that encourages students to develop abilities to adjust to a rapidly changing society.

In contrast to this progressive rhetoric, the school also demonstrates values that could best be described as traditional in a religious institution. Firstly, the school seeks to affirm “faith in Jesus Christ as the light of the world”.\(^{19}\) This is the first goal listed under the initial Vision Statement, highlighting its significance to the school. Secondly, the Vision Statement sees successfully educated students as possessing “self-discipline, independence and individual thinking”.\(^{20}\)

This Vision Statement and Goals was written by the Foundation Council and Principal. The discourses that emanate from this statement have been listed above. Nearly six years later, it will be interesting to see how this has been articulated by the school, and lived by the students.

Overall, Church College seemed a useful site for the exploration of issues of connectedness in the experience of key stakeholders, particularly the students, of the school.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Background**

Focus group research is a form of social research that is largely qualitative.\(^{21}\) This means that the emphasis of the study is less on an objectivist experimental methodology of research and more on specific cases and examples examined in context. As Neuman says, “The language of qualitative research is one of interpretation.”\(^{22}\) It involves researchers tracing the process of specific events,

\(^{19}\) *Ibid.*  
\(^{21}\) W. Lawrence Neuman *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Allen and Bacon, Boston, 2000. p.274  
\(^{22}\) *Ibid.* p. 144
interpretations and explanations in comparison to the social context in which these discourses operate. There are many different forms of qualitative research, including surveys, interviews and case studies, among others.

Focus group research is based on a special style of interview in which the researcher gathers together people in small groups to discuss one or more issues for about an hour or two. The group is gathered to focus their attention on a collective task, whether it is viewing a video, examining documents, discussing a specific set of questions, or some other task. What is important about the focus group is that it encourages participants to talk to other members of the group about their ideas and experiences of the issue that focuses the group. This allows the participants to generate their own questions, develop the frames and concepts at issue and challenge and extend those issues through the process of group interaction. For this reason, focus groups will be used to allow respondents to explore their perceptions, attitudes and experiences of connectedness at Church College.

Advantages of Focus Groups

There are a number of advantages to using focus groups as a research method. Firstly, it allows groups to explore complex thoughts and experiences in an interesting and stimulating way. Secondly, it is a useful technique to gain information from those members of a community that are often disempowered by the context that they are in. This is obviously useful for student-centred research involving school students and other school community members in a hierarchical school institution. Thirdly, focus groups can also be empowering for the participants, promoting a friendly and engaging atmosphere. Morgan and Krueger state that: “[F]ocus groups convey a humane sensitivity, a willingness to listen without being defensive, and respect for opposing views that is unique and beneficial in these… environments.” The significance of this is that focus groups can either help to reduce tensions in

21 Ibid. p. 274
emotionally charged situations or can make respondents feel positive about their shared experience through the research method.

Not only does the focus group method have benefits for the participants: it also has benefits for the researcher. Perhaps the most logistically important is its efficiency. It allows a significant amount of information to be gathered in a relatively short time frame. Focus groups can de-centre the power asymmetry between researcher and the researched, by making the researcher less significant than in other forms of research, such as in the face-to-face interview. It is hoped that this advantage of focus group research will help to circumvent the problem of my being a teacher within the school context and, as such, being seen as a representative of the hierarchy of the school who expects certain predetermined responses to questions.

**Size**

Traditionally, focus groups range in size from four to ten participants, but it is not unusual to have only three participants.²⁷ For the purposes of this study the number of participants in each focus group is restricted to three. Krueger identifies that the smaller the social group, the greater the ability for the respondents to have their voice heard. However, he does go on to say that smaller focus groups can result in a smaller pool of ideas for the group to consider.²⁸ In terms of logistics, however, the smaller focus group can be much more easily accommodated in terms of space and time. It also assists in more accurate transcriptions of the tape-recorded data. Because of the nature of the research being conducted, and the age of the majority of the participants, it is felt that smaller groups allow individual voices to be heard in a non-threatening environment.

The literature on focus groups recommends that focus groups are conducted in series. This means that multiple groups should be used to allow researchers to explore patterns and trends across groups.²⁹ By conducting focus groups in series it alleviates

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²⁶ *Ibid.* p.18
the potential of the researcher getting a ‘cold’ group – that is, a group that in some way is not prepared to participate. As well as this, focus groups can be influenced by a number of external and internal factors that can seriously undermine reliability. For example, a dominant individual can influence the reactions of the participants in a single group. Over a series of groups, however, the impact of these internal and external threats to validity can be minimised.

For these reasons, the structure of the focus group research held at Church College has a variety of structures to minimise extraordinary results. Firstly, there are a series of focus groups. The first focus group was a pilot group of Year Twelve students. The results from this focus group were used to assess the usefulness of the research tool and then modify it. Secondly, there were four groups of Year Eleven students at Church College. Thirdly, there were two focus groups of staff and two focus groups of parents. Fourthly, there was a focus group made up of members of the College Council.

While it is impossible to eliminate all external variables in research, it is worthwhile to attempt to remove as many variables as possible. For this reason all the student and teacher focus groups were conducted at the same time on a Tuesday afternoon when staff and students at the college are studying ‘Beliefs and Values’. For parents and Council members, however, the timetable was more flexible to accommodate the various schedules of these participants.

Role of the Group Moderator

In the research conducted on connectedness, I was the moderator of each focus group. In focus group research, the role of the group facilitator is very important. Krueger prefers to use the term moderator rather than interviewer in focus group research.30 This is because of the special function of the moderator within the group, namely “guiding the discussion.”31 The purpose of the moderator is to let the conversation flow in the focus groups. According to Krueger there are a number of important skills

30 Krueger Op Cit. pp 100-101
31 Ibid. p.100
that the moderator must possess. Firstly, they must have experience of, and be able to interpret the language, terminology and gestures of the cultural group(s) being moderated. Secondly, moderators should avoid appearing judgmental or favouring particular opinions within groups. Thirdly, the moderator needs to be prepared to sit back and allow the group to moderate themselves as much as possible.\footnote{Barbour \textit{Op Cit.} pp.12-14}

Perhaps most significantly for this focus group research is the persona I adopted as moderator. As a teacher in the school there is no doubt that I have a form of authority that could be seen to influence the responses of the students and parents. According to Barbour one of the reasons for adopting the focus group method is that it: “[M]ay ‘dilute’ the effect of the researcher’s own persona because group participants are usually addressing each other as much as (if not more) than the researcher.”\footnote{Ibid. p.14} This should add to the reliability the study. It is expected that the nature of the focus groups should allow students to feel comfortable, and it should work to negate any of the repercussions of the Hawthorne Effect.

The Hawthorne Effect is a well-known phenomenon in certain forms of social research in which the subjects respond to the influence of the researcher and seek to give what they perceive as the correct answers.\footnote{Nueman \textit{Op Cit.} p.240} This form of reactivity is an issue in this research, however, two things should work together to prevent this having too great an effect. Firstly, as stated above, the social dimensions of the group dilute the impact of the researcher. Secondly, as there are no correct answers to the interview questions participants were required to draw from their own experiences to respond to the questions. The open nature of the questions hopefully added to the validity of the responses gained from the interviews.

\textbf{Sampling and Sample Size}

Sampling is an issue central to the success of any study, for focus group research it is of particular importance in collecting data. This is largely due to the relatively small size of the samples in all focus group research. What is important to understand from
the beginning is that “[s]tatistical ‘representativeness’ is not the aim of most focus group research.”\textsuperscript{35} Rather, it is more important to allow social groups the opportunity to explore issues through discussion and interaction. For this reason, the sample size of each study depends largely on what issue the group is focused. This study looks at issues of connectedness expressed through different stakeholders in a single school context. As a result, the sample size of the study is largely determined by the size of the school in question and the need to represent the key stakeholders.

Because of the relatively small size of the potential samples at Church College, the number of groups examined for each stakeholder group is extensive enough to elicit rich individual responses. Four student focus groups of three participants represents almost 31\% of the population of 39 students. Two focus groups of staff represent 46\% of the 13 staff that teach Upper Secondary at Church College. The focus groups of parents and Council members also have a relatively high percentage in terms of these respective populations.

It is obvious from looking at this study that it is biased in favour of the students at Church College. This is due to the fact that the research seeks to prioritise the discourses of connectedness of students within a school community. As a result, it is imperative to canvas as broad a sample of students as possible. In a sense, the students are also placed at the \textit{locus} of discourse of student’s experiences of connectedness in relation to the discourses of student connectedness of the other stakeholder groups. The over-representation of student focus groups is a form of targeted sampling, aimed at highlighting the student’s lived experience of discourse within the school community.\textsuperscript{36}

In terms of the make-up of the focus groups, purposive or judgemental sampling was used. This is an acceptable method when doing field research on a specialised population like that of Church College.\textsuperscript{37} Of the twelve students selected, selection was based on four different criteria for the groups. These groups were devised according to type as follows: students with high frequency of detentions, students who

\textsuperscript{35} Barbour \textit{Op Cit.} p.7
\textsuperscript{36} By targeted sampling I am referring to the process of targeting specific groups in the sample of a study in order to highlight key information.
have been nominated for the College Honour Roll, students with high involvement in school co-curricular activities and students with little or no involvement in school co-curricular activities.

As the intent of the research does not encompass an examination of gender difference, however, there is no reason to make the groups either mixed or single-sex. In fact, research has shown that having both heterogeneous and homogeneous gender groups can be advantageous because it leads to rich and varied discussions. What is significant is that there are so many variables that can emerge in focus groups, trying to control the sampling to make it proportional is ultimately impossible. What is better is to identify groups that could have some valuable thoughts, experiences or ideas about the topic issues of connectedness from particular sets of perspectives.

The first focus group included students who have in some way been judged to be ‘successful’ by staff or the community, either through Citizenship Awards at the end of Year Ten or nomination for the College Honour Roll in Year Eleven. The reason for using this criterion is to identify students who could possibly be experiencing alienation from the school community. The second focus group was selected from students who participate in few, if any, co-curricular activities at Church College.

Participants for the third and fourth student focus groups were chosen to give voice to as many different ‘groups’ as possible within the school context. For this reason, the third focus group included students who actively participate in three or more co-curricular activities at Church College. The fourth focus group consisted of three Year Eleven students who appear most often on detention lists at the school.

The staff focus groups were opened to two groups of three staff members who were able to give up approximately 60 minutes of their time for the interview. The College Council focus group was made up of three members of the Council, including the Principal.

37 Nueman Op Cit. p.198
38 Barbour Op Cit. p. 8
Conduct

The research tool was devised prior to the investigation, and piloted on a group of Year Twelve students at Church College. This was to ensure that it was useful in examining the different discourses that exist within the school community of Church College. The focus groups were conducted in an informal setting that addressed the prepared set of questions attached in Appendix B. All results were recorded on a tape recorder and transcribed after the event. During the interview, I also took notes regarding the main points made by each person and read these back to the participants and asked if they agreed with the notes that I had taken. This was to ensure that they were satisfied as to my general interpretation of the data.

Ethics

All participants in the focus groups, including those that piloted the research tool, were required to fill in a consent form after reading the consent letter. Those participants under the age of 18 were required to sign the consent form themselves as well have their parents sign the consent form. All participants were informed that they could withdraw their support at any time. It is not envisaged that this research represents a threat to any participant in any way. Further, all the research conducted conforms to Murdoch University’s Ethics guidelines for research on human subjects.

All of the focus groups were recorded and the audiotapes were transcribed by a professional secretarial service. Participants were notified of this in the consent letter. They were also told that their privacy was assured, there would be no information given in the study that would allow them to be identified. All of the records would be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home office and destroyed after a period of five years.

Participants were also informed that the results of this research study would be disseminated in various forms to the different participants. The student cohort of Year Eleven students will be given a brief lecture reporting on the findings of the
study. The staff and parents who participate will each be given a 500-word summary of the findings. The principal of the school will be given both a written summary and a copy of the entire study to be made available to the Council as well as the wider school community. In this way it is hoped that the research can benefit the local school community in their planning and their pedagogical strategies.
CHAPTER TWO
CONNECTEDNESS AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

Connectedness and its Significance

As has been stated earlier, education is one of the most significant experiences of people in the Western world. Schools as institutions have a variety of different roles. Firstly, they exist as a means to shape identity and stratify society.39 They also exist as tools to create a disciplinary society, that is, as tools that generally reproduce rather than reconstruct society.40 Schools exist as intellectual institutions that prioritise certain truths. They exist as places that perpetuate those truths seen to be core values of Western culture. In short, schools are “always transformative in their impact on the lives of individuals”.41 The complex challenges confronting both students and school leavers in the 21st century are becoming of increasing concern to many educators as they seek to identify forms of pedagogy that will serve the best interests of the students and the larger society.

Disaffection is a worldwide phenomenon that has particular implications for schools and school students. This disaffection can manifest itself in many ways, however, the end result is the alienation of the student from the educational institution in which they experience this disaffection. This then has wider implications for the later lives of these disaffected students. In Defying Disaffection, Reva Klein wrote: “It’s not hard, wherever you look, to find children who can’t connect with teachers or what is being taught, or who feel like outsiders – for whatever reason.”42

If we think about schools, there are so many sites for potential conflict within the relationships that the students find themselves in, with peer groups, teachers, parents and the executive administration of the school all having significant input into the way

39 Symes Op Cit. p.3
40 Ibid. p.xii
41 Ibid.
42 Reva Klein Defying Disaffection: how schools are winning the hearts and minds of reluctant students, Trentham Books, Oakhill 1999, p.ix
a student identifies with their school. For this reason, it is no wonder that some students feel like outsiders. Issues such as discipline, homework, teacher-student relationships, as well as the important external factors to education such as socioeconomic status and parent aspirations for their children, all contribute to how well a student is able to find relevance in their educational experience.

In the study I examine notions and experiences of connectedness to a particular school. I define student connectedness as the opposite to student alienation. Connectedness is what allows students to feel an affiliation to their school. It allows students to feel positive about their educational experiences within the context of their educational institution. However, there are multiple factors that can contribute to a student’s feeling of being either connected or alienated. Perhaps the most significant factor relating to student experience of connectedness or alienation is student experience outside the educational institution. However, the institution itself can also be for a significant factor in terms of students’ sense of alienation or affiliation with their school.

For disaffected students these experiences can really be explored in terms of three main areas, as noted by Kinder:

[I]ndividual pathologies or personality traits: family circumstances or values and/or social factors within the non-attenders’ communities: and school factors, often located in either the curriculum or the ethos and the relationships encountered there by pupils.43

I would argue that the same factors are crucial in determining what connects students to their educational institutions. Issues such as race, class and gender among others also contribute to how students experience their schools. For this study, however, it is really the third factor of Kinder’s three that is of primary significance – how schools and stakeholders within schools live or engage a discursive practice of connectedness. The impact of external factors that contribute to connectedness or alienation are largely outside the control of the school. A Canadian study of disaffected youths found that: “The lower the occupational status and level of education of his/her parents, the greater is the statistical risk that any given student will not complete
school." This is a factor that is obviously outside the control of the schools. However, it does present a real problem for schools and society itself. In a rapidly changing society, students who do not complete their education run the risk of being severely disadvantaged in the future. Worse than this, this disadvantage could continue for each successive generation. With the current generational change in the job market, many students are denied the traditional job or apprenticeship opportunities that have previously existed. As a result, they now tend to stay in schools until the end of Year Twelve. The age participation rate for 17-year olds in secondary schooling in Australia has increased from 56.9% in 1991 to 62.2% in 2001. Feelings of connectedness are significant in that they enable students to identify with a small community, and through this, to engage with the wider community.

The way an educational institution approaches the task of education is very important as to how well that institution is able to create a positive experience of connection for students. Firstly, there is the problem of catering for individual needs in a classroom setting. The complex problem of how to cater for disparate behaviours, learning styles and cognitive development is an ongoing problem for all teachers. Symes and Preston hold that one of the greatest problems for education lies in the development of schools as technocratic institutions – that is as institutions aimed at making a skill contribution to the economy. This technocratic or instrumental approach to education can contribute to the loss of individuality amongst students – a kind of alienating assembly-line education. As Cooper explains:

Schools and classrooms are all too often places where children and young people go to be processed in various ways. Like products in a factory, they are often seen as ‘raw material’ that has to be fashioned into a particular product, ‘examined’ and finally dispatched to an appropriate destination.

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44 Quoted in Klein *Op Cit.* p.2
46 See for example the discussion on the former Minister for Employment, Education and Training, John Dawkins in Symes *Op Cit.* p.53
These sorts of problems are often grouped together under the label of school effectiveness. There has been a lot of work done on effective schooling. In their work *Managing Misbehaviour*, Charlton and David identify eleven main elements of an effective school.

These are:

1. That the school management used leadership practices that involved negotiation and consultation with colleagues, students and parents.
2. That there is a common school-wide policy that sets out behavioural and academic expectations and is consistently and humanely enforced.
3. Schools must have a curriculum that is matched to students’ present and future needs.
4. Institutions, staff and parents need to hold high, but not unreasonable, academic expectations.
5. There needs to be a system of rewarding positive student behaviour rather than punishing negative student behaviours.
6. The school should have an assessment policy that is well planned and promptly returned, and lessons that adhere to start and finish times.
7. The school needs to develop teachers who employ skills to motivate and arouse interest in students in lessons.
8. An effective school has a style of classroom management that anticipates and prevents behavioural problems, rather than waiting until they occur.
9. There needs to be supportive and respectful relationships between staff, students, parents and outside agencies.
10. It is a hallmark of effective schools that they have the opportunity for students to get involved in the running of the school.
11. Also important is that the school has an effective pastoral care system.\(^4^8\)

What seems significant about these characteristics of effective of schools is that they clearly identify the key stakeholders within the school community and identify strategies aimed at including these stakeholders within the school community. Not only this, Charlton and David’s eleven points identify the roles and responsibilities of

\(^4^7\) Paul Cooper *Effective Schools for Disaffected Students: Integration and Segregation* Routledge, London, 1993 p.16
the key stakeholder groups within the school. Strategies aimed at giving students a ‘voice’ in the running of the school are particularly significant in developing a sense of community within a school. Theorists such as Peter McLaren have grappled with the problem of how to educate students in a social context that has changed markedly since the advent of compulsory schooling and he holds that education is generally geared to transform students into citizens that abide and reinforce the status quo. McLaren posits that:

Knowledge acquired in school is never neutral or objective but is ordered and structured in particular ways: its emphases and exclusions partake of a silent logic. Knowledge is a social construction deeply rooted in the nexus of power relations.49

This social order is maintained through asymmetrical power relations that are evident in all systems of education. The notion of these power structures alienating and disempowering groups is one of the key concerns of critical theorists. Connectedness is just one of these issues. As Klein says, the problem of disaffection has become worse as schools become: “[M]ore goal-oriented and less flexible and, as part and parcel of these changes, increasingly unwilling to accommodate diversity of behaviour, cultural expression and ways of learning.”50 Paradoxically this comes at a time when schools operate on the rhetoric of being inclusive, of recognising difference and becoming more student-centred.

The link between connectedness and effective schooling is a complex but persuasive one. In short, it is posited on the idea that connected students are happy students, and happy students learn better and become responsible citizens when they leave school. Underpinning the idea of what makes an effective school is that it is able to develop an environment that caters for the needs of the students and is effective in creating students who have a sense of belonging and community that they take with them after leaving their educational institution. Those who do not experience this sense of affiliation become a problem for the school that they are in, and this sense of alienation can continue in the years after schooling. Peter Fensham states:

To a greater or lesser degree, every high school in Australia faces the problem of coping with groups of students who reject its values, programmes and norms. In time, the enthusiasm with which a number of students begin high school turns to apathy, or even uncooperative, hostile and antisocial behaviour. These behaviours often result in social problems that continue after schooling. This is supported by the fact that nearly half those on welfare in the United States come from families that leave school early. If, however, schools are able to instil in students a sense of community, a feeling of identity and belonging, then it seems reasonable that some of the antisocial behaviour might be better avoided. I believe that schools need to work at developing the concept of the whole student and focus on developing their emotional, physical and psychological sense of identity as well as their technical and intellectual skills. The reality is that if schools can work better at creating connection between students and the school community, then these students can flourish and be given the opportunities that they previously felt were denied.

Cooper examines institutions that are set up to provide for students a set of experiences that promote feelings of community amongst the students. He writes:

It is also interesting the way in which Malcolm and Jim talk about the ways that this type of caring behaviour is an aspect of the school ethos, by which pupils and staff behave according to a code which stresses the importance of mutual care and understanding.

I would argue that there should be similar focuses in all schools. By creating an ethos that develops a sense of compassion, understanding and inclusivity, I believe that all schools can achieve a sense of connectedness for their students. As has been stated previously, this feeling of connectedness may have significant implications for the wider community after the formal schooling of the individual has finished. Alienation does not just exist as extreme cases and schools need to focus on connecting students to the community of their school, as schools desire more productive outcomes for

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50 Klein *Op Cit.* p.xii
52 Klein *Op Cit.* p.2
54 Paul Cooper, *Effective Schools For Disaffected Students: Integration and Segregation*, Routledge, London, 1993 p.130
their students. As well as this, schools are attempting to come to terms with rapid change in expectations from the community, at a time when many of the core traditions of schools are being reassessed. In 1994, Hargraves wrote: “Schools are still modelled on a curious mix of the factory, the asylum and the prison…” Townsen thought that schools had changed more in the last 15 years than in the previous millennia. Bearing this in mind, it seems reasonable to suggest that what students connect to at school is also undergoing a transformation.

The Transformative Nature of Education

The basic premise that underpins this research is that education is, and should be, transformative. As far back as Plato in the Western tradition, educational thinkers have been theorising about what education should really achieve. For Plato, education was about training the free male youth of Athens into becoming responsible citizens, citizens who would function as members of a collective citizenship of the city-state. It was only through this process that Plato believed that humankind could achieve its highest purpose, however that may be defined. Part of Plato’s legacy is a tradition of educational thought that underpins much of the educational theory that has impacted upon the schools that we have today. Plato adhered to the principle that education is transformative and through this transformation should serve the needs of society. Plato believed that education should lead people to an awareness of universal truths. This awareness was premised on the belief that democracy was the truest form of political knowledge and that it was the obligation of all male citizens to support this democracy. This section of the dissertation will turn to a brief examination of how theorists in different periods of the industrial age have identified and described the aims and transformative processes of education.

57 Ibid. p.28
Symes and Preston argue that no matter what period of history one examines, times of transition correlate with what Foucault calls different “technologies of the self”.\textsuperscript{58} Schools as we know them today, they argue, were borne out of the desire “to produce the kind of sensibility that was needed if the industrial order was to function efficiently”.\textsuperscript{59} They go on to argue, and I agree with them, that:

\begin{quote}
[E]ducation, perhaps more than any other endeavour, is a social activity which takes place within a historical framework, which is both past and future oriented and traverses the territory of everyday practice as well as that of theory and philosophy.\textsuperscript{60}
\end{quote}

This quote highlights how important it is to understand education not in isolation, but rather as a set of social, historical and theoretical discourses that converge and diverge in a range of ways. Also, it is important to understand that theories of education as transformative have an historical tradition informed through a variety of philosophical traditions. As part of Plato’s body of work, the concept of schools having transformative effects that are, according to Symes and Preston, “by their very nature political in character” is important because it challenges educators to understand how and why connectedness operates within educational institutions.\textsuperscript{61} The purpose of the following stage of the dissertation is to examine several significant rationales for emancipatory education that have been developed since the early 19th Century.

The French theorist Jean Jacques Rousseau wrote in response to what he saw as some of the more alienating aspects of life during the early and middle industrial revolution. He was interested in the ways education could be useful in protecting against some of these negative effects. By asserting that there is moral and social good by following the “forces of nature”, he holds that the ills of society can be reduced to the evils inherent in civilisation.\textsuperscript{62} In the preface to his text \textit{Emile}, Rousseau wrote: “God makes all things good: man meddles with them and they become evil.”\textsuperscript{63} Rousseau’s faith in nature was an extension of his religious belief, a belief that held that faith in

\begin{footnotes}
\item[59] Ibid.
\item[60] Ibid. p.xiii
\item[61] Ibid. p. xii
\item[62] Mabel Lewis Sahakian et.al \textit{Rousseau as Educator}, Twayne Publishers, New York, 1974, p.27
\item[63] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
God was a natural characteristic of the educated person, but that dogmatic intervention in the life of the individual was one example of an alienating, unnatural society at work. Rousseau advocated that it was through culture, a specific form of culture, that the individual attained goodness. In terms of education, he believed that children needed to be allowed to form themselves, that the intrusion of civilisation into education only served to corrupt the potential of the child. Rousseau wrote that the society in which he lived was corrupt, it contained art that denatured the individual, making them evil and wicked. For Rousseau, by denying access to the evils of civilisation in education, we create the possibility of a community based on a ‘goodness’ that would prevent the alienation of individuals.

Rousseau held that culture could be measured through the art that it produced. By art he meant more than our contemporary notion of painting and sculpture. In a sense, the art that Rousseau identifies is what we call the humanities and the social sciences, the ‘Liberal Arts’. Rousseau viewed culture as the work of reason creating individual characteristics such as self-respect and dignity in the face of God. Rousseau viewed education as the process of bringing to consciousness what lies dormant in the psyche. In this, Rousseau follows a tradition of education that begins in Western thought with the writing of Plato. For Rousseau, education should allow ‘natural thought’ to develop, and in so doing the innate goodness of children would naturally emerge.

Rousseau held that natural education was essential to create an individual who was prepared for life. Rousseau thought that through education, individuals could be created who possessed the innate goodness he saw in all children. If these children were educated under Rousseau’s precepts, a society would be created that was natural, where individuals operated through a thirst for knowledge. This knowledge would allow society to progress free from the ‘unnatural’ culture that was responsible for evil and corruption in the world. By creating this natural individual, Rousseau believed that the ‘natural community’ would follow, free from vice, greed or corruption. Rousseau’s work had a massive influence on education in the Western world and it shaped the way that society identified how to educate children to become

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64 Ibid. p.28
65 Ibid. p.33
66 Ibid.
morally righteous in an unnatural world. The emphasis on natural forces in education was an idea taken up by many theorists, including John Dewey.

Dewey experienced a classical liberal arts education, and developed a notion of education as instrumental in the development of a transformed democratic citizenry. Central to Dewey’s educational writing was his desire to see education transform American society to one of equity and equality. Dewey’s impact on the American educational psyche was and still is immense and the following quote demonstrates how he was esteemed by some of his contemporaries: “John Dewey is today the embodiment of America’s most sensitive conscience, constructive intelligence, and intense democratic faith.”67 Dewey’s ideal society would be based on the idea of equal access of all to the privileges and opportunities in the United States, and would further ensure the continuation of democracy in that country. In an essay he composed for his eightieth birthday, Dewey wrote of some of the challenges he saw confronting the United States:

The period of free lands that seemed boundless in extent has vanished. Unused resources are now human rather than material. They are found in the waste of grown men and women who are without the chance to work, and in the young men and women who find doors closed where there was once opportunity.68

Dewey’s text *Democracy and Education* asserts that public education was a vital tool in creating a society that could maintain its democratic foundations. *Democracy and Education* was published in 1916, as Dewey struggled with the notion of how to organise a system of universal education which would best serve the needs of society throughout the 20th Century. Dewey saw education as a necessity for any society that sought to initiate all its people into the social project of civilisation. He saw education as a necessity because it allowed society to transmit the social and moral code of a society where that transmission has become too complex for parents to be entrusted.69 Schools enabled society to initiate “the interests, purposes, information, skill, and

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practices of the mature members” to the younger members of society.\textsuperscript{70} Without education, Dewey held that society would once again “relapse into barbarism, and then savagery [sic].”\textsuperscript{71} As such, Dewey envisioned universal education as a vehicle to control the moral subjectivities and productive abilities of the population.\textsuperscript{72} For Dewey, the transformative nature of education could be useful in a society attempting to create a citizenry that would participate in a shared form of public life. What is significant to this research is Dewey’s concept of education as maintaining and transmitting to students a sense of community. When Dewey considered the concept of community and identity, he defined it along nationalistic terms – that is, the community was the state. Dewey wanted education to transmit a form of connectedness that tied the individual to the community of the nation.

This quote identifies a key concern of Dewey’s – the ability of a society to make the maximum use of its social capital. In fact, he believed education should be instrumental in creating a sense of community within students. He saw classrooms as a place where a difference could be made. This difference, he felt, should work to make “a genuine form of active community life instead of a place set apart in which to learn lessons.”\textsuperscript{73} For the students to engage in this community life, they must first connect to the system that it maintains, democracy.

For this reason, Dewey advocated a pedagogy that was quite rigid in terms of social control, as the needs of the community outweighed the needs of the individual. He believed that where the community had a shared purpose, the individual would understand and even welcome the kind of strong direction he envisaged. He wrote: “Those who take part do not feel that they are bossed by an individual person or are being subjected to the will of some outside superior person.”\textsuperscript{74} In this quote, Dewey is arguing that when the community has a sense of shared purpose, individual desires became inculcated into community desires because the individual should more or less naturally wish to participate in the progressive improvement of the given society. He was not, however, interested in the kind of tolerance of diversity that we expect today:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{70} John Dewey \textit{Democracy and Education} MacMillan Company, New York 1966.. p.3
  \item \textsuperscript{71} \textit{Idid}. p.4
  \item \textsuperscript{72} Symes \textit{Op Cit}. p.82
  \item \textsuperscript{73} John Dewey, \textit{Democracy Op Cit} p.14
  \item \textsuperscript{74} John Dewey, \textit{Experience and Education}, MacMillan, New York, 1963, p.53
\end{itemize}
Dewey wants an homogeneous society, that was the major problem that he saw America facing in a period of rapid expansion and immigration of people from Europe with widely different, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, but in his commitment to social equality he seemed to see this coming through the education system which would, he thought, provide equality of opportunity.75

Dewey believed that the democracy found in The United States was fair and equal for all, and the obligation of the education institution was to maintain this system. Dewey took an important step forward from the work of Rousseau in that he was able to envisage a society working together within the industrial age for the common ‘good’. Dewey believed that it was important for individuals to feel connected with a community, as this allowed that community to progress and continue to improve itself, improving the situation for all of its members. For Dewey, however, the connectedness that he wanted society to conform to was one based on the state, where the connectedness experienced was a sense of nationalism, a patriotic connection to the democratic foundation of the United States. For this to happen, schools needed to mirror these democratic principles.

However, later theorists would criticise Dewey for a view of education that served to support and perpetuate the interests of the oligarchy over the emancipation of the individual. Later research, particularly identified by critical theorists, such as Peter McLaren, critique the part of Dewey’s work founded on a naive view of education. In particular, they argue that democracy, and the education system supporting it, is not about equality, rather it is about maintaining the oligarchical interests. The view of education that Dewey develops can be seen as instrumental in denying opportunities for the marginalised members of community. In summary, Dewey wanted individuals to be connected to the wider community through educational institutions to maintain what he saw as progress – an increasingly robust democratic society operating in a context of capitalism.

In the late twentieth century Peter McLaren continues the tradition of seeing education as transformative process, however, he sees that schools in the United States and Canada, and in other advanced capitalist countries, have become

75 Marshall, Op Cit. p.76
“damagingly bereft of both social conscience and social consciousness”. McLaren continues the political critique of Neo-Marxist educators such as Paulo Friere, arguing that schools are social institutions and teachers within schools are the purveyors of discourse that either endorses or challenges oppressive dominant ideologies. He argues that responsible teachers need to develop a critical perspective that informs the development of a critical teaching pedagogy that takes a stand on matters of equality and social justice.

McLaren articulates a view of education similar to that of Dewey in that it places importance on the idea of education as needing to be about equality. However, McLaren critiques the idea that education should be about maintaining the social status quo. McLaren asserts that the defining aim of educational institutions is a “desire for a more compliant, devoted, and efficient work force”. McLaren’s critical pedagogy is one that is about empowering all members of its community: not just those that inhabit privileged positions within society. In a sense, the major difference between Dewey and McLaren is related to their different attitudes to capitalist democracy. Dewey saw democracy as the means to enforce equality within society. McLaren, however, is critical of a system of government that “transmit[s] to disadvantaged students the message that their subordinate roles in the social order are justified and inviolable.”

By critical pedagogy, McLaren means a form of education that builds upon the traditions of thinkers such as Dewey, but that adopts the Neo-Marxist framework of Friere and Giroux. For McLaren, it means using education as a tool to provide “historical, cultural, political, and ethical direction” for students who will soon be facing the challenging realities of a world order that is alienating and denies basic equality. In fact, McLaren argues that schools do not exist as institutions that develop and maintain egalitarian and democratic institutions, rather they often work against these opportunities. The system of education and the schools themselves can work to alienate groups and to sever their connection with society by denying many students the same opportunities as the children of the wealthy and the powerful.

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[76] McLaren *Op Cit.* p.1
[77] Ibid. p.2
[78] Ibid.
McLaren, along with other workers in critical pedagogy, identify competing interests within the social order that can act as: “[D]isconfirming the values and abilities of those students most disempowered in our society already: minorities, the poor, and the female.”

The significance of McLaren for this dissertation is that he has a clear view of what he thinks society should be achieving through education. He envisages that education can be used to transform the citizenry from slaves of the system to critical thinkers who can actively engage themselves in the struggle for an emancipatory society. By encouraging a critical pedagogy, McLaren sees that there is a possibility to alleviate social inequalities through education. What McLaren is arguing is that community is possible only when we lay bare the ways that power operates within our society. Following this, connectedness would only be possible when all individuals are guaranteed the same possibilities as others. By doing this, a critical society could actively work towards an emancipatory society as a universal moral imperative.

When reviewing the contribution of the theorists Plato, Rousseau, Dewey and McLaren to this dissertation, some important points need to be made. Firstly, they all believe that education is, and should be, transformational. Secondly, when following their work it becomes obvious that there has been a shift in focus of that transformation from the highly individualistic positions of Plato and Rousseau. By this, I mean that they focussed on transforming the individual, content in the belief that this would create a society that was just, fair and equitable. Dewey began to see education as significant in transforming mass society, that is, not working on the individual but rather the collective population as a means to create what he saw as a fair and reasonable society. Lastly, McLaren builds on the ideas of Dewey to construct a view of the world that identifies education as needing to focus on the most disadvantaged if this fair and reasonable world for all is going to be created.

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79 Ibid. p.160
80 Ibid. p.163
The Postmodern Turn

In the late 1970’s, the academic world was challenged by a new series of thinkers, who challenged the existing state of academic debate. The concept of the postmodern is difficult to define, made worse by some key thinkers such as Lyotard and Baudrillard using the term, whilst Foucault felt he did not understand what it meant.\(^8\)

In *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard defined postmodernism as an “incredulity towards metanarratives”.\(^2\) Metanarratives are those overarching theories that seek to provide the answer, deeply rooted in the belief of a single, common reality shared by all individuals. This Enlightenment mentality followed a belief in universal ideals that could be followed from Plato to Marx. Postmodernity, whatever else it may mean, can probably best be understood to be a challenge to the traditional disciplines of philosophy and literary theory that has shifted the examination of previously valorised ideas such as freedom, truth and justice.\(^3\) Foucault is a key figure in the challenge to the forces of structuralism that dominated academic thought for much of the 20\(^{th}\) Century.

Foucault: Discourse, Governmentality, and the Disciplinary Society

Foucault is interested in the ways that power operates in all parts of society at all times and how forms of knowledge are connected to these power relations. Foucault identified that knowledge is a form of power, regulated, controlled and utilised by various groups within institutions. He rejects a hierarchical notion of power and instead sees power as evident in all social interaction. Foucault argues that:

> The real political task in a society such as ours is to criticise the working of institutions that appear both neutral and independent: violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that we can fight fear.\(^4\)

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\(^1\) Michael Peters “Introduction” in Michael Peters (Ed) *Naming the Multiple: Poststructuralism and Education*, Bergin and Garvey, Connecticut, 1998 p.2


\(^3\) Mary Leach and Megan Boler “Gilles Deleuze: Practicing Education Through Flight and Gossip.” in Peters (Ed) *Op Cit.* p.149

Foucault argues for an understanding of how discursive practices operate on the individual, and how the complex relationship of politics, economics and history constitutes “human beings as subjects.” Foucault holds that only by being aware of the complex forces that shape identities and experiences can individuals be emancipated from discourses that emphasise different social ideologies that produce subjective meaning. Like Lyotard, Foucault was opposed to those theories that sought to explain experience, because these were discourses that “systematically form the objects of which they speak” and in this formation create power structures that undermine and legitimate societal institutions.

Part of the key for Foucault was how certain social institutions create certain kinds of subjects at different times in history through the use and manipulation of power. For this reason Foucault is interested in what he calls ‘regimes of truth’ that occur differently and at different times in history and the ways that power relations can be read through the discursive practices of a particular time. Foucault does not read power as either ‘good’ or ‘bad’ but sees power as a primarily productive force. He states:

In fact, power produces: it produces reality: it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him [sic] belong to this production.

The significance of this quote is that it highlights that the power relations within institutions actually work to create certain forms of human subjectivities – and this creation is multi-faceted and complex. This study examines the various discourses that feed into notions and experiences of ‘connectedness’ by students in a local school setting. Power is not here seen as hierarchical, but dispersed and deployed in multiple ways. The work of Foucault will be used to uncover how these varying discourses are deployed to form certain ‘truths’ regarding students’ experiences of connectedness to their school. A variety of stakeholder groups, including staff, peers,

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86 Ibid.
and parents within the site will be asked their views on what they think is significant in terms of students experiences of connectedness.

Foucault wanted educators to be aware of the classroom as a site that could either maintain or challenge the discourses that legitimated society. “Every educational system is a political means of maintaining or modifying the appropriateness of discourses with the power and knowledge they bring with them.”

Foucault developed this idea as the “principle of discontinuity”. The principle of discontinuity holds that power operates in a variety of directions, and that some discourses stand in antagonistic opposition to other discourses. This can result in some discourses becoming sites for resistance, or starting points, for oppositional discourses from within the ranks of certain subjects groups themselves.

For Foucault, what was significant in education was the creation of the disciplinary subject. He argued that the institutions that underpin social interaction such as prisons, asylums, courts, and schools aim to watch and ‘know’ subjects in society through the gaze of what is considered normal or acceptable. By examining the histories of these institutions, Foucault holds that what can emerge is an understanding of how multiple realities operate upon bodies to render them as subjects within the normalising project. As he concludes Discipline and Punish Foucault writes:

[T]he notions of institutions of repression, rejection, exclusion, marginalisation, are not adequate to describe, at the very centre of the carceral city, the formation of the insidious leniencies, unavowable petty cruelties, small acts of cunning, calculated methods, techniques, ‘sciences’ that permit the fabrication of the disciplinary individual. In this central and centralised humanity, the effect and instrument of complex power relations, bodies and forces subjected by multiple mechanisms of ‘incarceration’, objects for discourses that are themselves elements for this strategy.

This quote demonstrates the many ways that subjectivity is constructed within social institutions such as schools. As well as this, it also highlights Foucault’s position that

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88 Ball, Op Cit. p.3
89 Ibid. p.2
90 Ibid.
91 Symes and Preston Op Cit. pp.30-31
92 Foucault Op Cit. p.308
multiple potential discourses create the docile bodies that inhabit our world. Further, it is the ways that power manifests itself as an exchange that serves to create the disciplinary society.

Particularly important for the study is Foucault’s notion of ‘regimes of truth’. Within social institutions such as education, regimes of truth act as “…‘judges of normality’ and endorse and benefit from the splintering of knowledge and the disempowerment of the unknowing”.93 These regimes of truth can exist as technologies that serve to explain contemporary attitudes to complex attitudes. In terms of the issue of connectedness, it is not too much of a stretch to imagine that this notion has been used to reinforce dominant beliefs and attitudes as to what students should expect from their institution, that is, what makes it ‘effective’.

However, the notion of ‘belonging’ is central to the concept of connectedness, as it creates a discourse that permeates cultural associations and institutional relationships. In particular, this concept of belonging requires the subject to define themself in terms of the particular narratives of those specific groups. Lyotard describes these as “narratives,” while Foucault identifies this as the “regimes of truth” that permeate all social interaction.94 Foucault wrote that “the history of the West cannot be dissociated form the ways its ‘truth’ is produced and produces its effects.”95 Understanding of these narratives or truths provides an insight into how power is used within these social groups to define what it means to belong, or to connect with a given group or institution, and therefore the institutions in which these groups exist. Foucault stated:

We begin to see the connection between narratives and power. Narratives belong to particular social groups. They are the property of anyone who can define themselves in relation to them. It is intrinsic to narratives that they marginalise certain kinds of knowledge as irrelevant to or incompatible with the knowledge shared by the group.96

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96 Ibid.. p.100
In order to understand social groups and the complex discourses that constitute power within those groups, it is important to understand the discourses operating within the social institutions.

Foucault developed the notion of governmentality to explain how forms of activity are used to govern the individual, both externally and internally. Governmentality is a combination of the words ‘government’ and ‘mentality’. It is meant to examine how power is deployed as a dynamic that shapes the conduct of individuals, but also “the attempt to constitute people in such ways that they can be governed”. Foucault’s work examined how the history of the organisation of knowledge in terms of how the technologies of both the self and domination contact and negotiate their transactions. These technologies of domination and of the self are crucial in making “the individual a significant member of the state”. Marshall comments that governmentality could be understood this way: “[The] activity of governance could cover the relations of self to self, self to others, relations between institutions and social communities, and the exercise of political sovereignty.” For this dissertation, the relationships that the students, as members of social communities, experience in relation to the governmentality of the institution is an important theoretical consideration. The way that technologies of the self and domination are deployed by the institution has significant ramifications for the connectedness of the students within that institution.

This idea presents many possibilities for interpretation within the context of individual institutions. Foucault held that through governmentality the notion that subjects are normalised by this governmentality is central to one of the key ideas that emerged in the later work of Foucault, that of freedom. Foucault felt that freedom could only happen through resistance to the governmentality of institutions by individuals. When commenting on the work of Foucault, Taylor wrote:

He lays bare a modern system of power, which is both more all penetrating and much more insidious than previous forms. Its strength lies partly in the

97 James Marshall “Michel Foucault: Philosophy, Education, and Freedom as an Exercise upon the Self” in Michael Peters (Ed) Op Cit. p.72
98 James Marshall Michel Foucault Op Cit. p.112
99 Ibid. p.111
100 Ibid. p.153
101 Marshall Michel Foucault Op Cit. p. 112
fact that it is not seen as power, but as science, or fulfilment, even ‘liberation’. Foucault’s work is thus partly an unmasking. 102

This dissertation partly seeks to ‘unmask’ the systems of power, and the governmentality of institutions as it impacts upon notions of connectedness students experience in a school. The importance of this is that the notion of connectedness, or how students identify with their school is itself a discursive practice – it too is located within the governmentality of the institution. Miller and Rose argue that:

[A]n analysis of modern ‘government’ needs to pay particular attention to the role accorded to ‘indirect’ mechanisms for aligning economic, social and personal conduct with socio-political objectives. 103

I would argue that connectedness is a mechanism that can be used to align the personal conduct of the individual to the socio-political objectives of the wider society. This dissertation gives voice to the student experiences of connectedness because it is through this that a more valuable insight into what constitutes connectedness can be discerned. By looking at the different stakeholder groups discourses of connectedness in light of the responses of the students, a greater understanding will be gained as to how power is deployed within an educational institution.

In his writing, Foucault sought to challenge the existential view of philosophy that dominated Continental European thought after World War Two. Foucault argued against the notion of the rational being, a being who is able to arrive at an advanced state of ‘freedom’ in the Western world through the pursuit of knowledge as truth. In this sense, he was arguing against the philosophical positions of Plato, Rousseau and Dewey. Foucault did not believe in a world where individuals attain ‘freedom’, bound as they are within the nexus of the: “triangle, sovereignty-discipline-government, which has as its primary target the population and as its essential mechanism the apparatuses of security.”104

104 Michel Foucault “Governmentality” in Graham Burchell et al. (Eds) The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality: With Two Lectures and an Interview with Michel Foucault. Harvester, Wheatsheaf, London, p. 102
It should be understood that Foucault is not advocating a value-free hopelessness. In fact, by ‘unmasking’ these systems of power, Foucault is trying to allow people to renegotiate their view of the world. Foucault himself wrote:

My role – and that is an emphatic word – is to show people that they are much freer than they feel, that people accept as truth, as evidence, some themes that have been built up at a certain moment during history, and this so-called evidence can be criticised and destroyed.105

This dissertation seeks to advance our understanding of how connectedness is articulated in schools, and how what has possibly been accepted as truth, is not always so. The basic premise is that the notion of connectedness is a form of knowledge as power, controlled, regulated and maintained within the history of the educational institution, to serve the vested interest of the institution itself, the larger society as well as, in some respects, the interests of individual students and citizens. As with all forms of power, this power is deployed and contested through countless interactions everyday in the school context. As such, connectedness can be considered to be both a ‘technology of the self’ and a form of power deployed to maintain the ‘governmentality’ of the school as an institution.

Foucault and Connectedness

One of the charges levelled against many of the post-structural thinkers such as Foucault is that their work becomes relativistic. By relativistic, critics mean that the notion of multiple realities has removed any social or moral imperatives from social practices such as education. Blake et al. wrote that schools have become affected by a kind of paralysis associated with the recognition that through the traditional transmission of knowledge:

[T]here is no objective knowledge: that truth is as you see it: that “what’s true for you” is one thing and “what’s true for me” is another: that individual children can and must construct their own idiosyncratic knowledges: that

105 Ball, Op Cit. pp.1-2
different groups (race, classes, nations, religions) have different knowledges: that teaching someone to see things your way is at best an empty charade and at worst an act of violence.\textsuperscript{106}

However, Blake et al. defend the post-structuralist theorists against the charge of relativism, arguing that it is more useful to see it as a tool that opens up discourse to be examined and understood in new ways.

A philosophy of education which is able to engage with the quotidian realities of educational practice needs analytic tools for describing institutions for describing institutions, language and discourses, their interrelationships and the knowledge that is discovered, produced and maintained within that context.\textsuperscript{107}

I stress the point that connectedness is really a multitude of discourses produced and maintained through a variety of different groups and different perspectives. The object of this dissertation is to look not at connectedness itself, but at the discourses of connectedness. Foucault’s work on power, discourse and governmentality offers the opportunity to identify these discourses as a crucial first step in creating critical awareness of the role of connectedness in the educational institution. For Foucault, the school represented one of the key institutions of a ‘carceral’ society.\textsuperscript{108} By a carceral society, Symes and Preston argued that Foucault saw a society that disciplined its members through the shaping of them as docile bodies.\textsuperscript{109}

In a sense, the problem of the relativist debate is paralleled with that of connectedness itself. On the one hand, this dissertation is obviously identifying connectedness as something significant, as something worth understanding because in some way it has value. Part of my view is that some forms of connectedness could be instrumental in creating a population that is ready to accept responsibility for living in an emancipatory society that is based on the democratic traditions of equality, care for others and care for the self.

\textsuperscript{106} Nigel Blake, et.al., \textit{Thinking Again: Education After Postmodernism}, Bergin and Garvey, Wetsport, 1998, p.7
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid. p.18
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid. p.3
\textsuperscript{109} Symes and Preston, \textit{Op Cit.} p.30
It is important to understand that connectedness can be termed a ‘discourse’, a discourse that is made up of a variety of discursive frames that can be understood in different ways. Discourses of connectedness are neither ‘good’ nor ‘bad’, but I would argue that some of these discourses are more useful than others in understanding students’ lived experience of connectedness. For example, some forms of connectedness to society can promote a complacency amongst the population, which works against the notion of a critical population struggling to read their world. One has only to look at the experience of some levels of the population inside Nazi Germany to see what can happen when a connected population hands over their critical awareness of the world in exchange for the certainty of identifying with the nation state through Nazi policies such as Gleischshaltung (Co-ordination) and Volksgemeinschaft (The People’s Community).  

I would argue that the opposite is true as well. There are some forms of connectedness that create not docile bodies, but critical minds. Because of this, understanding the discourses of connectedness is crucial in understanding how a disciplinary society is produced. In the future this initial study could provide a valuable staging point on the path of understanding what impact connectedness has on the lives of students. If we return to the quote where Foucault states that his role “is to show people that they are much freer than they feel”, then an understanding of discourses of connectedness could be part of this conditional emancipation. By understanding discourses of connectedness, we begin to be critical of the ways in which schools produce students who conform to or resist a disciplinary society.

Now the focus turns to the discourses themselves as articulated by the stakeholders within a school community. When reading the following section, it is important to consider it in the light of the work of Foucault, to use his theoretical position as a lens, if you will, through which we will ‘see’ the converging and diverging discourses that construct connectedness in our world. The following chapter presents the results of the empirical research at the local school site.

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CHAPTER THREE
RESULTS

Conduct

All of these interviews were recorded and transcribed after the event. Each individual’s name has been changed to protect their anonymity. Where participants have given information that by its nature reveals their identity, this information has been removed. As many quotes as is practical have been included to provide the reader with a sense of the responses and attitudes of the participants. As well as this, I considered it important to allow the participants to tell their own story rather than putting words into their mouths. When a change has been made to ensure the grammatical integrity of their response, this was placed in brackets to ensure that the reader knows that this was added.

Pilot Focus Group

The pilot of the focus group was conducted with three seventeen-year-old Year Twelve students at Church College. The reason for selecting this group was because of their emotional and intellectual proximity to the group in question – namely, the Year Eleven students at Church College. The pilot was conducted within a relaxed atmosphere outdoors. The pilot began with a brief introduction about what was expected to happen within the group in terms of interaction with each other and the interviewer. The students were encouraged to be honest, and reminded that in no way would the dissertation use their findings or reveal their identities. The participants were asked if they had any questions before the pilot focus group was asked any questions. There were none.

At no stage was the area of study revealed to the participants. For this pilot to be successful, it was felt that the students needed to be able to assess what the questions were designed to investigate. If the research tool did its job, then the students would be able to indicate what issues the questions were addressing.

particular, Chapter 8 provides excellent information.
The questions were then asked in order (see Appendix B), with various prompts being used to explain the context of each question. These prompts were then included in brackets after the questions on the research tool for use in later focus groups. Of prime importance was the role of the interviewer in allowing the participants the space and time to complete their responses to the questions. The participants later commented that this was a positive feature of the pilot because it gave them an opportunity as a group to work through their shared understanding of what the question was asking. Given the time, the participants were able to develop and extend their responses to the questions asked, eliciting deeper insight into their experience of connectedness at Church College.

At the end of the focus group, the students were asked to evaluate two things. Firstly, they were asked to consider what the research was about. All of them agreed that it was about their experience of feelings of ‘belonging’ and ‘community’ at Church College. This indicates that the research tool was effective in examining the notion of connectedness to the school community. Secondly, the students were asked to examine the questions, and point out any problems that they had with them. They all agreed that the questions were easy to understand, and that they had no problems responding to them.

However, on further reflection I felt that there was a problem with one of the questions. Question Six reads:

> The Church College Mission Statement reads that it is “…developing people of conscience who play a responsible role in creating sustainable compassionate communities”. How well do you think that Church does this?

It was felt that this should elicit detailed responses from the participants regarding what the values were that they felt that the community of Church College transmitted. On reflection, however, it was obvious that the participant missed some of the prompts in the quote from the Mission Statement. This tended to make the responses quite superficial. Perhaps the reason for this was because the students were not really able to reflect on the question. In future focus groups, it was decided that students would have access to a written version of the quote to reflect on. This should enable
the participants to give their understanding of how Church promotes key ideas such as ‘sustainable compassionate communities’. As well, as this, the question acts as a useful conclusion to the interview. With the exception of this, the pilot focus group went well, and helped to affirm the general methodology of the research.

**Student Group One**

The first student group that was interviewed was the group defined in the methodology section as the students who were judged to be successful through their previous experiences and achievements within the school. The three participants were all winners of either a citizenship award in Year Nine or Ten, or had a significant achievement recorded on the College Honour Roll. The purpose of selecting the group in this fashion was to assess whether students who have their success at school officially recognised have a particular discourse of connectedness. The focus group was conducted on a Tuesday afternoon, and the students were both articulate and expansive in their responses.

When asked what they liked about Church, the students spoke about the small size of the school, and the opportunity to form close relationships with the teachers. They felt that these relationships aided their learning of the subjects that they studied. ‘Monique’ said: “It is better because of the teacher student relationships you can build with the teachers. With such small classes it is not as many kids for the teachers to look after, it is easier to learn.” The small size of the school enabled the students to identify with their teachers. It is interesting to see the importance placed on the relationship with their teachers of this group of students. In fact, there was very little else that the students were able to comment on as positive. All three in the focus group nominated the small size and the parent teacher relationships as positives. In fact, they mentioned nothing else. This demonstrates how powerful teacher relationships were in their experience.

When asked what they disliked, the students were quick to nominate a lack of resources in the school. They said that they understood why the school was under-resourced, but they still saw it as a negative of their schooling experience. ‘Sven’ commented on what he saw as computer problems in the school. ‘Engelbert’ stated
that he disliked the: “Lack of facilities. We don’t have a gym or that sort of stuff, it will come in the future but it would be nice to have it now.”

‘Monique’ found that the relationships between the teachers could be unsettling for the students.

*Some of the teachers, also some of the teachers have little catfights that everyone notices and that is a bit weird to react to. You notice some of the teachers have disagreements and other teachers get really annoyed with what they do and what they say and you just pick that up when you are in the classroom. Something happens and we notice it.*

What really stood out in this focus group was the importance placed on the relationships that the staff maintained within the school. The above quote shows how closely the interactions of the staff are monitored and observed. When these relationships are positive, these students obviously feel that they are a source of connection to the school. However, when they are not harmonious, the students can sense this, and it makes them uncomfortable.

The students identified a source of connectedness that was mentioned by most subsequent focus groups – that of the relatively small size of the school. When asked what worked to help the students feel part of the community of their school, ‘Engelbert’ responded that it was: “*The size of the school. Everyone knows each other, not everyone gets along but we can tolerate each other most of the time. Just the size makes it a close-knit community.*” Because of the small size of the student group, the participants felt that this meant that the student cohort could not really divide into separate groups. ‘Sven’ noted that: “*As a student community, there are no different groups like you see on TV, there are no stereotypes.*”

When asked what experiences they had had that developed in theme a sense of allegiance to the school community, each student nominated their experiences at Inter-School Carnivals as significant. For ‘Engelbert’, being selected was crucial in creating a sense of connection to the school community. “*You are representing the school so it makes you feel closer to the school because you are actually selected to go and represent the College.*”
However, for ‘Monique’ it was the overall success of the school that was significant. When she competed at these carnivals, the most significant thing that connected her to the school was the beating of other schools in overall points. For ‘Sven’, success of individuals at carnivals was significant because of the close relationship that each student had with their peer group. He stated: “We actually know the people that can win. In a big school you would not know them so you wouldn’t feel allegiance to them because you don’t know them.” ‘Sven’ went on to say that one of the things that connected him to Church was the recognition that he received for successes. For him it was: “Being congratulated for winning stuff. At other schools you didn’t get that, they would say here you go, now go sit down, here they clap and it makes you feel good.”

‘Monique’ agreed with ‘Sven’, adding that the opportunities that she and her family had at Church where significant in her feeling of connection to the school community. She said: My mum is in the uniform shop, I have been a House Captain, I play netball for Church, I have umpired for Church, I have represented Church at interschool [carnivals].

When asked about the Vision Statement, the responses from the participants were very interesting. Firstly, all of the participants seemed puzzled by the question and had to have the phrase explained to them. ‘Monique’ commented that: “We have never heard the Vision Statement before.” When she had the statement explained to her, she made a comment that underlined the significance of the relationships between staff and students.

Some of the teachers, not all of them, they try to beat it into you. Make you do things, like you are slaves and stuff, so you are not really making compassionate people, you are making people who take orders.

One of the key issues that this group felt left them feeling excluded at times was inconsistency in relation to the rules and how the staff enforced them. ‘Engelbert’ spoke about his feelings of frustration and alienation when he felt he was treated unfairly about the school’s policy towards coloured hair. He stated: “I got threatened because I had tips in my hair, I was told in no uncertain terms – ‘If you don’t get that
cut out, you will be suspended.’” His frustration concerned a student who had their whole hair dyed, and nothing was said to that student. He wondered whether there was a different rule for the ‘compliant’ students, and a different one for those considered too hard to discipline. ‘Monique’ fed off this and stated a point vehemently: “Inconsistency, if you are going to have a rule at least be consistent, otherwise it is not a rule.”

With the exception of these things, this group found it very difficult to think of any things that they would change at Church to help them feel part of a community. This would seem to support the idea that this ‘successful’ group was, in part, successful because they were already connected to the school community.

When asked why it was important to feel connected to their school community, ‘Monique’ answered:

If you don’t feel connected to your school, you are going to feel depressed, and all your work will go down because you don’t want to work here, you don’t want to come to school, you don’t want to learn.

Student Group 2

The second student focus group interviewed was the group that was selected as being those who did not normally have a vehicle to express their thoughts and feelings within the school community. This group comprised all female students, and their responses were less forthcoming than other groups. They tended not to discuss their responses with each other and build on them. I would not define this group as ‘cold’, as the responses that they gave were thoughtful and useful. Rather, their responses were typified by a general shyness – which one might expect given the nature of the purposive sampling.

The second focus group identified many similar things that worked both for and against their experience of connectedness. The small size of the school meant that they felt more secure, and more able to develop strong relationships with their
teachers. ‘Tarnie’ said: “You feel safe here, they are your friends and you can communicate with them.” Later in the focus group, ‘Tarnie’ went on in more detail.

You have got your close knit friendships and you are a community with them, you know everyone by name, you know of them, all the teachers know you and [the principal] knows you so you feel like everywhere you go you are always accepted.

Like the first group, they found that negative relationships with staff members could act as an impediment to their feelings of connectedness to the school community. As ‘Paris’ said: “I dislike how some of the teachers treat you like you are still kids, like ‘Do this, sit down’.”

Unlike the other group, however, this group clearly identified that there were marked groups within the school community that acted to divide the cohort, causing many students to feel excluded. ‘Tarnie’ commented that:

Even though most people are really good friends, there are still some groups and they won’t talk to anyone out of their group. That is pretty bad. It is a small group, you should try to be friends with everyone in your year.

Like the previous group, the importance of the role of the parent in connecting their student to their school community was obvious. One of the students played in a netball team, and her mother was the coach of that team. ‘Paris’ commented that: “Netball also makes you feel like that [connected to the school community]. Mum being the coach for that was good.” ‘Tarnie’ also had experience of her mother coming into school to work as a volunteer assistant in the school. She found that experience helped connect her family, and therefore herself to the school community.

She gets an understanding of how it is at school. When she is at home she doesn’t understand it as much. She knows the teachers and the kids. It makes her understand what going to Church is like for me.

When asked what made them feel a part of the community at Church College, the answers were informative. ‘Kathryn’ focussed on her experience of co-curricular activities through playing for the College Band. This experience in things outside of the school left her feeling ‘involved’, as if she had something to offer to the wider
community that was valuable. ‘Kathryn’ stated: “We are involved in things for Suburb X and Suburb Y. I like being in the Band as you get to represent Church at the Environment Centre and the Suburb Z Spring Fair.”

‘Paris’ also spoke about the significance of being involved in the wider community that resulted in a positive identification with the school community.

You get an opportunity to be in all fundraising ventures. You get an opportunity for all the sports and you get to play in Suburb X against other schools. There are all the different sports, fundraising, Carols by Candlelight, the Quiz Night. It is not a big school, if you are good even in one event you can go. Just to show off the school. That is good.

Unlike the first focus group, this group felt that there was an exclusion that took place at Church, based on the relative merits of doing either a TEE course or a non-TEE course. ‘Paris’ commented:

If you are in the non-TEE subjects like Early Childhood Studies, people see it as a waste of time. They are in a TEE subject and you are not. With the Maths, just because you are in the lower group, some of them say you are in the low Maths group or the low English group, you are not as smart.

When asked what they would change, the students nominated two major things. The first thing that they would like to see changed was more recognition for the efforts of all students, not just the high-achievers.

More recognition for the things you do for Church. If you are in a club or something, you should get recognition that you have done that, you are responsible and a part of the community.

Secondly, the students felt that there needed to be more opportunities for them to be leaders in the school, and to have clearly defined opportunities to demonstrate that leadership. The students felt that more whole-school activities such as ‘Church Day’ would give them the opportunity to practice and develop their leadership skills. When asked why it was important to be connected to the school, ‘Tarnie’ replied with the following statement.
You have a sense of belonging, it makes you feel good about yourself. It helps your self-confidence knowing you are accepted at the college. You have good friends and teachers. It makes you feel heaps better and you won’t degrade yourself. It is what starts you off for everything else you do in life, so you need to feel a part of it.

Student Group Three

The third student focus group consisted of three students who were involved in at least two co-curricular activities at Church College. These activities included sporting activities such as cricket and hockey, cultural activities such as the band, and service activities such as cadets. All three members of this group were male. This was inadvertent, as the defining characteristic of the group was not decided by gender. From the start, this group was very clear, if a little concise, with their answers. They tended to give one answer each per question and rarely discussed the questions with each other. Having said this, their answers were valuable in developing how they viewed the notion of connectedness.

As with the previous groups, the students commented on the small size of the school as something that allowed them to connect with their teachers. This relationship with their teachers was significant in that it allowed the students to feel as if they were important. ‘Marcus’ commented that what made it worthwhile was that he was aware that the teachers did more than was necessary in order to give the students opportunities. He stated that:

I like how if they don’t have something, they make inquiries on how to get around it instead of just saying “No, we don’t have it”. I like how they use up their free time and stuff, they don’t have to, out of school.

This group found it very difficult to find anything that they disliked about Church College. The only thing that they were able to mention was that sometimes when the girls in the year group fought, it made their social experiences difficult. However, when asked what made them feel a part of the community, the responses focussed on their experiences of representing the school. ‘Ricky’ said that:

I do feel a part of the community and it is the inclusion, you are not forced to but it is suggested to. The sporting with the hockey and the cricket and other
sports. It caters for everyone’s interests. It is not just one thing that you have to conform to, there are all sorts of different stuff that you can do. You can pretty much do what you want.

For ‘Marcus’, his sense of community came from having opportunities, not just on the sporting field, but also in the classroom:

I do [feel part of the community], and probably the thing that makes me feel a part of it, probably not one class I have where a teacher doesn’t ask me a question, or doesn’t call my name about six times.

When this group discussed things that had connected them to Church College, it was success in co-curricular activities that were most significant. ‘Ricky’ spoke about the feeling he got from winning his first game of hockey. ‘Damien’ spoke about what it was like to receive recognition from the wider community for his role in the band:

I play in the band as well, and the band does a lot these days, it gets a lot of recognition, and makes the school really happy. The school gets a lot of recognition as well from it. I don’t mind doing that for them.

What added to the connectedness of this group was their willingness to get involved in activities. It is a moot point to wonder which comes first, connection to the school which leads the student into representative activities or connectedness occurring through their involvement in these activities. However, what is obvious in this group, judging from their responses, is that they feel very connected to the school – probably more so that any other group. When asked what he disliked about Church, Marcus replied: “I don’t see much wrong with it.” When asked if they had ever felt excluded or neglected from the life of the school, ‘Damien’ answered:

I think everyone [is] given the opportunities, it is whether or not they have the right attitude. There are a few negative people around that have always got something to say about Church.

When asked what things they would change about Church to improve the community, ‘Damien’ wanted to see the school have mandatory co-curricular participation.
I would make extra curricular activities compulsory. Everyone has to do at least one. It helps you get involved after school and you [get] focused on by teachers and you seem more active.

‘Marcus’ wanted to see a student council formed as a way to give all students within the school a voice, and a sense of ownership of how the school is run. ‘Damien’ wanted to see more whole school assemblies, with more opportunity for the whole community to get together and share experiences. He wanted:

A few more whole school assemblies, getting the junior school involved with the senior school. The others [schools] have buddies and stuff, so maybe if we have some of that stuff up here. We might go to the junior school sometimes and find out what is going on down there. So we are a bit more all together.

When asked why connectedness was important, this group came up with similar reasons as the other groups – it was important because it would give them the skills and opportunities to succeed after school. ‘Marcus’ commented:

If you are connected to your school then you can get connected to your work place. If you have a friendly environment you seem to work better and feel more comfortable. It is like having a business, if you are happy you work better.

**Student Group Four**

This group of students was identified as those students who would appear to be the most disaffected. These students were either those who appeared most frequently on after school detention, or those who had been suspended from the college in the last 18 months. There were two female and one male student interviewed in this focus group. The group interacted well with each other and responded enthusiastically to the questions asked.

Perhaps the most significant response of this group was that they generally did not feel connected to the school community. When asked if he felt connected to the school, ‘Bruce’ replied: “I feel like I am chained to the school. I feel like I am more connected to the people.” The people that ‘Bruce’ referred to were his peers. Unlike
other groups, this group did not respond well to the role of the staff in their education. When asked what she disliked about the school, ‘Odette’ responded by saying:

_The administration of the senior school, the power. When Mr X first came here he would treat you like a friend and have a joke with you, but now it is like sit up, be quiet. There is so much distance between teachers and the students._

It is not surprising to find this group resisting the role of authority in their education. In fact, one of the major experiences that they really disagreed with was what they saw as an invasion of their privacy. As Church is a small school, they felt that they had no freedom to express themselves without their teachers finding out. ‘Odette’ said that:

_Teachers gossip about this kid and they all, for instance in Year Nine and Year Ten and there was a party and all the teachers know about it. [The teachers] have got nothing to do with it, we are out of school._

‘Penelope’ mirrored these feelings when she said: “_There is a lot of interference from the teachers with our lives._” In fact, these students felt that it was the attitude and actions of the staff that harmed the sense of community. ‘Odette’ asserted that: “_There is a community feeling. If only the teachers would get over how much older than us they are. [...] More like trying to get a connection with us._”

For these students their experience of the college was dominated by their peer groups, and a feeling that the staff were intruding into their community. It was not that they would not allow staff into their community, it was more that they resisted a sense of community in which there was a power hierarchy that placed them at the lower end of the scale. ‘Bruce’ said: “_Some teachers are allowed into our group, into our community, but other teachers just don’t want to be there. They say ‘Your community is broken up’. _”

It is interesting that one of the things that the students nominated as a positive was that they liked the fact that it was “small and personal”. ‘Penelope’ felt that one of the positives was that: “_It is smaller than any other school and the teachers give more personal attention to you. They care more about you and things._” One wonders if the
order of the questions asked could explain the seeming contradiction in the quotes. The first question gathered the positive responses about the role of the staff. The negative responses happened later. It would be reasonable to assume that the students began the focus group saying what they thought I wanted to hear. However, as the interview progressed they began to explore each others feelings in more detail, more honestly. The other possibility is that the responses indicate the problematic nature in trying to find the one ‘answer’ when dealing with complex human relationships.

Even in this group, however, it was their experience of the school outside of the normal school day that contributed to the feelings of connectedness that they were able to recall. For ‘Bruce’ what was significant was his ability to bring a particular skill that he had to Church Day, and perform it in front of the school. Because he had not participated in any other activity for Church, this gave him a sense of community that he had not really shared in before. “I don’t do anything for the school, then we had Church Day, that [performance] made me feel like a connection thing not just an outsider.” ‘Penelope’ commented that it was her experience in the band that gave her a feeling of connectedness. “I am in the band, I have been involved with them out of school. It made me feel more connected to the school. We have got a lot of recognition from the places, we are a good band.” Once again, these feelings of connectedness are phrased in terms of the relative success of the students.

For ‘Odette’, what connected her to the school was her relationships with teachers. She said: “Connection with the teacher is a big thing that gives you connection to the school.” When asked what things that they could improve, ‘Odette’ commented that many people in the school seemed to undervalue the experiences of the students. “Because when you think about it the school is for the student, you can’t have a school without the students. [...] We [staff and students] should work together.” When asked why it was important to feel connected to their school community, this group found it difficult to formulate an answer. Their responses seemed to be based on the immediate situation, with little thought for what happens after school. I would argue that perhaps their answers were based on what they thought I would want to hear. None of them seemed to be able to articulate their own understanding of why connectedness is important. This is exemplified by ‘Odette’’s answer: “You feel a
part of the school. If you don’t, you don’t treat it with respect.” Their discussion of this question soon led them to the problem of gossip, rather than a discussion on connectedness.

The student responses have been summarised in the following table.

**Table 1 Summary of Student Responses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group</th>
<th>Responses Regarding Student Connectedness to Their School</th>
<th>Responses Regarding Student Disconnectedness to Their School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Student Focus Group One | - Small size of the school.  
- Small class sizes offering greater teacher/student interaction.  
- An opportunity to develop positive relationships with staff, as well as the principal.  
- The opportunity for older students to ‘look out for’ the younger students.  
- The fact that all students come from a similar background and have similar aspirations.  
- The co-curricular programme.  
- The opportunity to represent your school, and contribute to its success.  
- Recognition of success for those students who achieve well. | - The lack of facilities.  
- The obvious power plays amongst some staff members.  
- Authoritarian teaching strategies and discipline policies.  
- Peer groups fighting.  
- The lack of a transparent selection process for certain events – why are some people chosen over others?  
- The way that school rules and procedures are not always enforced by the staff, a feeling of double standards.  
- The lack of variety of clubs and groups, if you are not into sport, the school does not seem to offer much for the students to belong to.  
- The lack of leadership roles for anyone who is not in Year 12. |
| Student Focus Group Two | - Close relationships with teachers.  
- Small peer group means that you are always accepted and welcomed.  
- Small peer group means that you have to maintain positive relationships with your peers.  
- Individuals are always involved in community activities.  
- A feeling that they are creating the culture and ethos of the school for other generations to follow.  
- A feeling of safety and security.  
- The involvement of parents helps them to understand what it is like being a teenager. | - When teachers treat students like little children.  
- A lack of facilities  
- Younger students who don’t have respect for the older students  
- The problem of groups forming  
- Immature teachers  
- The hierarchy of subjects; TEE vs. non-TEE.  
- Students not very good at dealing with difference  
- Students using wealth as a status symbol |
| Student Focus Group Three | - Small size of the classes means closer relationships between teachers and students.  
- More ability to change, to adapt the structures of the school for special events.  
- The atmosphere is more friendly, there is not such a group emphasis.  
- Teachers include all students.  
- The co-curricular programme, | - When there is a social disagreement, the smaller group means that it is more noticeable, and the fallout affects more people. |
particularly when it results in success.
- The involvement of parents makes it feel more like a community.
- Everyone is always asked to participate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Focus Group Four</th>
<th>Student Focus Group Four</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The school is small and personal; this causes closer relationships between all members of the community.</td>
<td>Teachers gossip about the students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A feeling of safety.</td>
<td>Teachers interfere in the private lives of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students are acknowledged when they do something well.</td>
<td>Power as a tool that distances staff from students, and makes the sometimes hostile relationships that form a barrier to a school community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The co-curricular programme, particularly because the staff give up their time.</td>
<td>Teachers only like students who agree with them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There is no right of reply when you are accused of something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers treat students like children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some of the students are so immature</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusion to Student Focus Groups**

As Table 1 reveals, student responses in each of the focus groups revealed a range of issues and attitudes. All student groups found forms of connection in the co-curricular programme that the school offered. Also, all students commented on the small size of Church as something that allowed them to connect to their school community. As well as this, the significance of relationships with staff and students for connectedness to exist was a view that was repeated. This explained the continual reference to the small size of Church. Students felt that positive relationships with staff and peers generally resulted in a feeling of positive connection to the school, negative relationships certainly resulted in a sense of frustration. Some students commented on the involvement of a parent in a facet of the school as contributing to their sense of belonging to the school community. Students felt that any success that they had that was viewed in a positive light made them feel a part of the community. On the down side, many students felt that they were being watched, and this intrusion could lead them to being judged by the school community unfairly. When this happened, students felt alienated them from their school community. Students seemed to react most negatively to rules that they did not deem relevant, or to times when they felt that they were unfairly singled out. Student’s alienation often seemed to occur when they felt that the hierarchical nature of the school was disadvantaging them in some way.
Parent Group One

The first parent focus group was made up of two mothers and one father of current Year Eleven students. Of the mothers, both had been heavily involved in the community at Church College as members of the Parents and Friends Association, and managers or helpers of various co-curricular groups. The father was a less familiar figure around the school, although this was dictated more by the constraints of his job than anything else. The members of the group knew each other before the focus group.

When asked what they thought their child liked about Church College, the responses were very similar to that of the student groups, small size allowing the students to develop positive relationships with their peers and the staff. ‘David’ said: “The school allows them to have intimate close personal relationships with the teachers, small classroom sizes. The friends that they make.” ‘Christine’ went on to add that the co-curricular program of the school was a significant factor in what the students liked about their school. For her, it is:

What is offered. For a small school, they have a lot to offer the co-curricular things. The subject choices, they do better because of the sizes of the classes. There is the band and the cadets. For a school the size it [is], It think it has a lot to offer in that way. It is well supported by the staff, the majority of the staff. By the kids themselves.

‘David’ also suggested that being a foundation student meant that the students had the opportunity to create the social fabric of the school, and to take advantage of a sense of ownership of the growth and success of the school.

When asked what the students disliked, the parents responded in very similar ways to the students, nominating a lack of facilities and some problems with certain teacher/student relationships. Because Church is a small school, this meant that students could not avoid certain staff with whom they did not feel comfortable. Parents commented that this could mean a student taking action as drastic as dropping a subject altogether. For the parents, this constituted a failure of the school to engage
and develop the whole student. ‘David’ stated:

*That [the ability of the students to learn] is fundamental. That is what school is all about. If you can’t offer some sort of alternative to the same teacher, if you haven’t set up good teacher/student relationship[s], so that they can relate to each other, appreciate each other for what they are, it just put[s] up a barrier to learn.*

Another factor that they thought disconnected their children from the school was the problem of inconsistency in terms of discipline and expectations. When students perceived others getting different or more favourable treatment, they got frustrated and were less inclined to view the whole school experience positively. ‘David’ commented:

*Mixed messages like that, really undermines everything you are trying to achieve. They are the little things that are very important, they can use that in their own way, anytime they want to point out discrepancies.*

When asked what connected the students to Church College, the answers focussed on experiences of co-curricular activities. However, two different factors emerged from the focus group than what the students had identified. Firstly, ‘David’ identified that it was the House system that provided the students with the biggest sense of identity within the school. David believed the House system created a community that students could belong to – a community within the larger community. “*I found the biggest identity that they have had is belonging to the House within the school.*”

Another thing that the parents commented on was the opportunity for the students to represent Church in some activity as an important site for creating a sense of community. ‘Joan’ commented: “*Something you could take from that is, of the kids [that] are asked to do something to represent the college, it makes them feel better about themselves and about the school.*” However, ‘Joan’ went on to argue that one of the problems with opportunities is that they are not always given to all students – the same students tend to be selected for all activities. ‘Joan’ argued that this could actually alienate those students not chosen to represent the college. ‘Christine’ disagreed with this, saying that students are given the opportunity, but they get cold feet and back out.
One of the things that they all agreed on was that it was significant as parents that they all took an interest in the life of the school. This interest could be in a variety of different forms, but family connection resulted in a stronger sense of community at home. ‘David’ said:

*Having my wife work in the Uniform Shop, there is a definite and extra association there. She is here a bit more often and brings that family closeness to the school. The friendship with the [name of another family], we all socialise outside the school.*

When asked about the Vision Statement, the response altered dramatically. The parents as a group felt that this was something that sounded good in theory, but was not really examined or developed at the school. ‘Christine’ said:

*I don’t think they do it well. I think they think they do it well. It depends on your kids, some of them do, but we are saying that they are trying to make everyone care about everyone else, but I don’t think a lot of them do. It comes back to consistency all the way throughout.*

‘David’ also felt that the Vision Statement was too inaccessible for the parents and students, and that there was not enough focus on making this an objective for the college.

*If you are going to have a Vision Statement and get any value out of it, it needs to be high profile, it needs to be in your face and you can use it. You have to advertise to the point where people know it exists and even remotely understand it. Having it buried in some book, that is the problem.*

For ‘Joan’, what was missing was a school subject that developed in the students a sense of compassion and understanding, an opportunity to make a focus out of developing an understanding of community and its importance within a school.

*Is this something they are supposed to learn in school as a whole or something that should be taught in Beliefs and Values? [...] Why don’t they have Beliefs and Values? That is an issue with me, it doesn’t exist in Senior School.*

The Vision Statement was seen as a potential unifying goal for the whole school community that could be used as the focus for connectedness of students and families. David stated: “If that is your mission, that is what we are all working towards all the time. If that is your Vision Statement that is what you are trying to head towards and...”
For the parents, connectedness of the students and connectedness of the family are inextricably linked, what is important is that the focus is on the whole community. ‘Christine’ commented:

> When you are talking about communities, it is not just the people in the school, it goes back out to parental support and the ties the parents have with the school as well. I don’t think that is very well done.

When asked why it was important for their child to feel connected, most of the responses focussed on a link between connectedness and performance. ‘Joan’ said: “They perform better if they felt connected.” ‘Christine’ said: “If no one cared and they weren’t getting anything out of it, they wouldn’t try.”

**Parent Group Two**

The second focus group got off to an unfortunate start when one of the participants was forced to pull out at the last minute due to illness. Because the other members of the focus group were already on their way, a decision was made in the interests of the study to go ahead rather than making further demands on the busy schedules of the parents. While this was not ideal, the results gained in this focus group were detailed and informative and extremely useful for this study. The parents in this focus group all had sons or daughters who participated in the student focus groups.

Both of the parents in this interview nominated the peer group of their children as important to the connection to the school. ‘Mary’ said: “I think he likes his peer group, in that, the interaction he has, I would think that would probably be the most important thing.” ‘Eric’ identified the “camaraderie” as the most positive experience of schooling for his son.

When asked what they thought their children disliked about the school, one issue emerged – that of the lack of facilities at the school. ‘Mary’ said: “In [my son’s] case there is a certain lack of facilities that he sees as a down side. The school isn’t very
good because it doesn’t have these things.” Both ‘Mary’ and ‘Eric’ felt that this was often articulated as a sense of comparison with what other schools supposedly ‘have’.

An interesting point was brought up by ‘Mary’ about the uniform. She noted that the uniform was something that connected the students, not because they liked it, but because they disliked it. She argued that this gave them a common identity, a shared experience that drew them together as a group.

[The students dislike] the uniform, but it’s probably, I shouldn’t like this uniform and I shouldn’t have to wear it, it is probably that if what identifies him as a member of the Church community. It sounds a bit silly, but he complains about it [as it] identifies them all as part of the community. It is not the wearing of it, the hating the wearing of it. Beyond that, they all complain about all the same things that they don’t like about it, the dress code, your hair can’t be this, you can’t do that, all of those things that easily identifies them within themselves, because they all don’t like it, they all don’t like the idea. In a backward way, that makes him feel part of this group.

‘Eric’ spoke about how it was his son’s experience of the co-curricular activities that gave him a sense of belonging to the community at Church.

From [my son’s] point of view because he has had participation in numerous activities through his time here, being in the band which has always been high profile, and his participation in the Mock Trials and all those sort of things, it gives them that feeling. Being part of it, the Church community. And again having started from the bottom, he is identifiable.

In fact, a perceived lack of success by the students corresponded with a feeling of embarrassment at belonging to the community. This could manifest itself in a separation of school life from the life of the student outside of school time. ‘Mary’ said:

He actually doesn’t see that there is any connection between the two. They don’t mingle because one group wouldn’t mix with the other group and I think at times he can even be, he might even be embarrassed about being part of the Church group.

His embarrassment may be related to a perception that his school does not have credibility in the wider community – it is seen as a ‘soft’ place in what is a
competitive world. This problem is not a unique one, I would argue that it is part of the struggle for schools to be relevant to people in many different contexts.

‘Mary’ went on to say that her son could be proud of the school in different contexts, contexts that could be considered more personal and private.

In different groups, perhaps he is proud of it, in a family situation or within the extended family group. Yes he is quite proud that he is at Church because he is successful there and everyone seems to be pleased about that. But other groups and more his age range, not necessary going to say anything about that because it is actually a detrimental point rather than a positive.

For ‘Eric’, the problem he saw with the identification with the school was that it lacked an identity itself, and as such the students struggled to understand what they were trying to identify with.

The older the school gets, you could ask the question in ten or fifteen years time and there would be a different response. At the moment they can’t identify it with that much. I went to a school that was created in 1893, a hundred years of it going on and we were unique in the city I came from, and you had great pride in everything you did, you were just on show all the time. Where as here, it just seems to be like a school that is out at Suburb Z.

One of the other factors that the parents identified was that the small size of the group could work to exclude people who did not conform to the expectations of the wider group. However, the small size also meant that those students who were excluded were also included at various times. ‘Mary’ said:

It is interesting though, because it is a club, and it risks, the type of risk is that it is a small club that if you actually don’t fit in, you really are not going to fit in, but they seem to have, whether there has been a selection by parents that because the kids are nerdy, we will send them here, because, from my experience, X has talked about this kid being outside their group, then in another conversation, in another setting, that particular kid is incorporated and becomes part of that group, so there is an opportunity for them, you are never really right outside, you might be on the edge of a group.

When asked how well the school was following its Vision Statement, ‘Eric’ commented:

Church is a sustainable compassionate community. I can’t put my finger on how it happens, it just happens. Whether it is through good direction from up top, that is part of the deal. Good teaching staff is another part of the deal and again the type of kids that have been coming here. It all creates that.
‘Mary’ commented that:

*I think that they must go some way towards it because some of the discussions that have come home that they have had in different classes about things that are going on. Talk about the things that are happening around us, so there is discussion about it and open discussion about it. So the fact they are without realising it, being made to be aware of what is happening around them and that there are arguments about how those issues are handled gives some conscious and some understanding of the community. The fact that they are then expected to take the issues and maybe do fundraising for whatever, the sponsored child give another dimension that they wouldn’t get elsewhere. There are strategies that enable those things to happen.*

When asked why it was important for their child to connect with the school, similar themes emerged as with the previous parent and student focus groups. ‘Eric’ explained the importance of a sense of connection in this way:

*For future life, really if you don’t make a connection in your school time, you really struggle outside. Not a lot changes, you just get older and become the same sort of person you were at school. Some people don’t, but you have got to interact while you’re at school, with all sorts of things to become a part of that community, just as surely as you do when you leave school and it leaves you in good stead for when you get a job: your own business, your house, family, wife all those sorts of things.*

‘Mary’ said:

*You could easily say they don’t have to connect, there is no reason for them to connect, but, they would then be isolated within a group, and if that is what they are going to take from this experience to their future life, where they are completely out of step with everyone else and isolated, then they probably don’t need to connect because that is what is going to happen. So you want them to connect so that they do want to come to school, so that they do want to be with the other members of the community and be inspired to work together to achieve their own outcomes so that within that group they want to work and to learn those life skills.*

Parent responses have been summarised in the following table.

**Table 2 Summary of Parent Responses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group</th>
<th>Responses Regarding Student Connectedness to Their School</th>
<th>Responses Regarding Student Disconnectedness to Their School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent Focus Group One</td>
<td>• Friendships&lt;br&gt;• Small size of the school&lt;br&gt;• Relationships with staff&lt;br&gt;• More opportunities because of the</td>
<td>• Conflict is more difficult to avoid in a small school&lt;br&gt;• Students can’t avoid teachers that they don’t like</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
small size
- Co-curricular; because it allows the students to experience success and foster positive relationships with staff
- House system as a pastoral care structure
- Representing the school

- Lack of facilities
- Inconsistent application of school rules
- A lack of a clear focus of what the school expects from students
- Institutional bullying based on ability and success from the students
- Same students are picked for everything
- A lack of organisation from the administration
- Not enough is done to get parents to support the school

| Parent Focus Group Two | • Friendships  
|                       | • Successes that students have as individuals and as part of teams  
|                       | • The opportunity to create the culture and traditions of a school  
|                       | • Co-curricular  
|                       | • Opportunities to try new things  
|                       | • Small size of the school  
|                       | • Students are individually encouraged to do their best  
|                       | • Lacks the charisma of tradition  
|                       | • Lack of facilities  
|                       | • Students expect material proof of success  
|                       | • Students dislike the pettiness of the uniform rules  
|                       | • Embarrassment at the lack of external success of the school  
|                       | • Different attitudes and expectations of families in the community makes it difficult for their children to relate to each other and to the school

**Conclusion for Parent Focus Groups**

Table 2 points to the fact that the parents were all unanimous in their desire for their children to feel a part of the community at school. The reasons for this varied, but all agreed that people who can work well in a community are more likely to lead more constructive lives in the community once they leave school. Parents spoke about many possible sites for student senses of connectedness. These included: the co-curricular programme, the relationships with staff and peers, the shared experience that they have of the school with staff and peers and the small size of the school. Parents felt that it was important that students had the opportunity to be involved, and that all students were able to experience an element of success. Parents felt that the students were alienated when the discipline system was not rigidly enforced. As well, many of the parents liked that at Church there was a similarity, and a connection amongst families outside of the school. One of the issues that emerged was that parents expected Church to deal in ‘success’. What this success was they were not really sure. However, they thought that it was extremely significant in how students saw themselves and their school communities.
Staff Group One

The staff focus groups volunteered to participate in the study. The first staff focus group was conducted on a Tuesday afternoon. There were three staff in attendance, each of whom taught in a different area. The focus group went well, with the staff interacting with each other and exploring each question asked. From each participant there were a number of different and interesting responses as to what they thought connected students to Church College.

The staff thought that there were a number of factors that connected students to Church College. These factors were diverse and ranged from the co-curricular activities of the school to the relatively small size of the school. ‘Will’ commented:

There are some things that we offer that they are quite keen on, cadets they must like it, as it is a large corps. Some of the sports teams are well supported. It terms of number and kids that want to play it, I believe they enjoy that, they like that, they like that about Church.

The ‘Cadets’ referred to is the Church College Emergency Services Cadet Unit. In 2002, it had a strength of 44 members. These members range from Year Eight to Year Twelve. Church also offers opportunities for its students to participate in sporting activities such as cricket, hockey, netball and soccer. Whilst this can be seen as a strong factor connecting the students to Church College, some staff believed that these co-curricular activities could be a potential source of alienation for the students. ‘Will’ said:

They also dislike that [there] are not more extra-murals or granted greater variety, [and that they are not] more competitive. I don’t think they understand why we are not, which I think it is pretty justified. They would like a greater variety: they would like us to be better. They see that as a negative or something they dislike.

In a sense, staff perceive that central to students perception of connectedness is the success of the activities that they undertake. This success can only be judged in relation to other institutions in the community. When the team does not experience success, staff assume that this corresponds to a feeling of embarrassment at the institution itself. This idea is further underlined by the staff-member named ‘Boris’.
When asked what sort of connection students had with Church College, he had an emphatic response. “They want results: a lot of people specifically want something from the school.” The achievement of what the wider community perceived as good results, this staff member believed, would create within the students a sense of community. ‘Eric’ pointed to the experience of the students at Inter-School Carnivals. Over the proceeding years, Church has doubled its total points at each carnival this was very successful in creating students who connected to their schools.

Another very interesting point raised by the staff was the importance of tradition, or ritual in connecting students to the school. Tradition, they believed, created a sense of belonging of and familiarity with the school. This served to make the students more comfortable within the life of the institution. ‘Boris’ stated:

> Traditions are a part of it. It is an element that is common not only in a particular group but sort of through time. They can see this is where we have come from and this is where we are going. Obviously that is definitely something in the establishment phase because the school is in the establishment stage.

The significance of this quote is twofold. Firstly, it demonstrates the importance of continuity in creating a community within the school. Secondly, it articulates the idea that this tradition is a developing thing, and often a difficult thing for schools to create in its formative years.

Other things that felt could connect the students to their schools were friendships and relationships with particular staff members. This was cited in reference to the security that students’ experience as members of a small school. This sense of identity with the school as an institution is highlighted by the experiences of those students who come to Church from different schools. ‘Sally’ argued:

> I think that the security element would be a fair aspect. Partly because the school is so small, partly because of the house/form rooms. The fact that we have the open windows, so as they walk by, or between classes, they see what’s going on or the same faces.

Another interesting idea was that what created a sense of community was the idea of there being a shared purpose. This shared purpose, whether it was academic, cultural
or sporting, served to unite the students involved, if only for a short period of time. ‘Sally’ continued:

*I think it goes from day to day. For example with Drama, when they were working on The Importance of Being Earnest and they were very focused on a specific goal, they all decided [that] to pass they would have to apply themselves, then there was definitely a sense of community.*

The extension of this idea is particularly illuminating – that where there does not exist a shared purpose, the sense of community fades quickly. This was the experience of the Drama students when they had finished their production. The group seemed to fragment and lose that community spirit that ‘Sally’ commented on before.

One of the interesting thoughts that emerged in this focus group was that some staff perceived that the ideas of community that the school was trying to foster was often in competition with the values of the students’ parents. ‘Boris’ commented: “*They see it (the rules and regulations of the school) as an imposition upon them. They have a strong sense of what [are] their rights. (…) I think it comes from their parents actually.*” This notion of different values and expectations within different groups, or different discourses, is significant as the school attempts to create a school community united by common goals or shared purpose. They argued that the competing discourse of individualism at the expense of a sense of community undermined the student’s ability to connect to the school, through the attempts of the school to create a sense of connectedness within the students. Will posited that: “*As long as students are thinking me, myself, I, and my immediate gains, it is going to be very difficult to build on facilities and opportunities for them to connect.*”

**Staff Group Two**

The second staff group was composed of a similar group of teachers, all operating in the Senior School. As was to be expected, they noted a number of similar factors that contributed to student connectedness at Church College. One of the issues that they commented on was the positives and negatives associated with the small size of the Senior School. As ‘Bob’ commented: “*They like the fact that they can know – even if they are not taught by them – they can know every teacher and every student.*”
The staff interviewed in this focus group placed a great deal of emphasis on staff relationships with students as being central to students connecting with their schools. The size of the school meant that the relationships were more open and personal, and gave the students an opportunity to develop closer relationships within the staff. However, where these relationships were not as positive, the relative lack of size of the school meant that it was difficult to escape these difficult relationships. As ‘Bob’ said: “In a big school with a big staff, there maybe two or three people you don’t like, but you may never have them as teachers, here you are going to have everyone at some point in time.”

Peer relationships could also be problematic. Whilst the size of the school lent itself to closer peer relationships, the small size of the school could also mean that students who were different for whatever reason were not able to find safety through a set of like-minded individuals. As ‘Sarah’ said: “The students who are a little bit on the outer (...) don’t have the pool literally to find new ones from: they don’t have the large year group to seek out new friendships.”

As with the other staff focus group, this group identified the importance of co-curricular activity and representing the College as important in developing a sense of connection to their school community. ‘Bob’ commented that: “Hockey, school sporting teams, cadets, Outward Bound, those sorts of things. Again, because it’s small, they are a tight group. That in itself gives them a sense of belonging.” In terms of developing identity, ‘Bob’ spoke about how important it was to have rituals at the school that the students identified with. However, he argued that it was difficult to build rituals in a new school that were effective in connecting students to their school community, as these rituals take time to be effective. He stated: “There are no great traditions and there are no rituals that we have in the school community. [The community] is ill defined here.”

This staff focus group also dealt with the problem of the significance of the parent values and attitudes in the connectedness of their students. However, unlike the previous staff group, this focus group was more positive about the parent experience of Church. When asked the sort of connections that students have with Church, this
focus group quickly identified that students who had parents involved in the school were more connected to the community. ‘Bob’ argued that:

*Students who have a very strong Church identity or feeling towards the school, their parents are also involved in the school, in the P & F and [other] involved activities in the school. That always helps if your parents are involved.*

‘Roger’ continued this theme, arguing that parental identity was often fed by their child’s experience of the school. He asserted that it was parents who decided to send their child to Church College because they were looking for something different. Their experience of the school worked to make them more positive about the school. Roger stated:

*I don’t know that there are many students going home everyday being depressed or disappointed with what they have experienced during the day. So I think parents seeing their sons and daughter’s contented with what’s going on. That has to be a plus.*

The significance that both staff groups gave to the parent/child relationship and their shared experience of the school community was particularly interesting, as both groups tried to articulate what they believed connected families to the community.

When asked about the Church Vision Statement, the second teacher focus group believed that the school did develop people of conscious, however, this was more by chance rather than good management. The issue seemed to be that there wasn’t a concerted focus within the school to prioritise the Vision Statement. Bob said:

*The two most important words there [in the Vision Statement] are conscience and compassionate. You can’t let those two things be absorbed by osmosis. You actually have to create opportunities for kids to actually realise they should have a conscience. We probably don’t do a lot.*

What ‘Bob’ is arguing is that the Vision Statement could be a central platform to creating the type of community that the school wants to be. However, because it is not given value through concerted focus, an opportunity to create a connection is lost.
When asked what they would change about the school, they nominated a more stringent discipline policy, stronger communication, and more leadership opportunities for all students, not just a select few in Year Twelve. Like the other focus group, this focus group felt that academic success would ultimately create a more positive feeling of connection throughout the whole school. When asked why connectedness to the school was important, ‘Bob’ commented:

*It stays with you for life. It moulds your opinions quite often and you bring with them with you all your life. (...) People underestimate the influence of a good school on people. I don’t think they appreciate the influence of a bad school, a good school can have a profound life-long effect.*

Staff responses have been summarised in the following table.

**Table 3**  
**Summary of Staff Responses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group</th>
<th>Responses Regarding Student Connectedness to Their School</th>
<th>Responses Regarding Student Disconnectedness to Their School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Staff Focus Group One        | • Small classes, peer groups, school  
• Students know everyone  
• Success in co-curricular  
• Positive relationships with teachers  
• The feeling of satisfaction when groups of students work towards, and achieve, a common goal  
• The emerging traditions  
• Friendships  
• Security                                                                 | • Limited viewpoints, students are not very good at dealing with differences  
• The pettiness of rules and how they are implemented  
• An ‘Us and Them’ attitude between staff and students  
• Parents not supporting the school and staff  
• Not enough groups for ‘different’ students to belong to.  
• Lack of choice in co-curricular activities  
• The results focus of the community when there have not been any results on the board |
| Staff Focus Group Two        | • Security of a small school  
• Positive relationships with some staff  
• Relatively relaxed discipline policy  
• The opportunity for the students from K-12 to interact  
• A safe haven for ‘difficult’ students                                                                 | • Lack of resources  
• Small size makes it difficult for students who don’t fit in  
• No great traditions that unite the school  
• No clear sense of what the school is trying to achieve  
• Not enough leadership opportunities for the students  
• Inconsistent discipline policy                                                                 |
Conclusion for Staff Focus Groups

Table 3 reveals that the staff tended to focus on many of the structural consideration associated with their views on connectedness. In particular, the size of the school and the resultant social dynamics were key features for them. The staff also nominated that students were able to feel safe and important at Church. The staff generally thought that the small school environment had some benefits. They thought that it enabled students to develop closer relationships with staff. They also felt that it meant that their contribution, or lack of it, gave them an importance in the school. However, the small size of the school also resulted in some potential forces for alienation. Amongst these were the lack of facilities and the lack of success that Church had when compare to other schools. It is interesting to note that the staff responses were focussed on the issue of success; what it means, how it is experienced by students and what impact the discourse of success has on their experience of school.

Council Focus Group

The council group was made up of three long-serving members of the Church Community. Each of these persons had had more than three years membership in the College Council. As well, each of these participants are members of the congregation of various Uniting Churches in the metropolitan area. The focus group was held in the Principal’s office. The participants were very open and friendly, and obviously held each other in high regard.

When asked what they though the students liked about Church College, the responses tended to focus immediately on the concept of community. It was obvious that the Council felt that this was extremely important. ‘Simon’ commented:

I think there is that camaraderie, I think it is all tied up in the ethos of the school. Where we are trying to get the student to respect each other in a caring, Christian environment. And I think we recognise that every student is different, every child has his or her own value. To do that they work together and support each other.
The Council members found it quite difficult to discuss what they thought students either liked or disliked about Church. It was almost as though they were hesitant to say the wrong thing. When asked what the students disliked, there was really only one response from the group. ‘Ross’ commented:

_They would probably dislike some of the hard and fast rules that are there. That is all part of the discipline and I think that is one of the reasons parents, these days, are sending their children to independent schools or private schools, because, they perceive there is better discipline and maybe, the education is better. I think that kids like to be their own, on their own and do whatever they want to do, but bringing them back into a disciplined environment at that age, will allow them to grow and become better members of the community._

The Council felt that what created a sense of community in the school was the fact that the relative youth of the school meant that students were able to create their own culture within the school. Significant experiences mentioned were the band, Church Day and the first graduation of Year Twelve students in 2001. For ‘Louise’ this was very much the school community recognising that they had achieved something special:

_Last year, it really struck me the graduation, the first graduation of Year Twelves, there was this feeling of, this is the first time, we are a part of it. There was a feeling of success from the rest of the school, we have achieved this._

‘Ross’ commented:

_The school is so young, it is not established for a hundred years, where you have old boys and old girls and all this business, here we are breaking new ground with a lot of stuff and as I said before, I am not an educationalist, but I can see a lot of good things going on here, and the children are being caught up in that. That is to the benefit of the community. Part of creating their own culture._

The council members reflected a concern of the staff, that the experiences and expectations of the parents could act as a barrier to the student developing and experiencing a positive feeling of connectedness with their schools. All of the council members agreed that a difference in expectations between the parents and the school
itself in relation to the governance of the students could result in a level of hostility. This could then be transmitted to the student, alienating the student from their school community. When asked what they had seen or heard about students being excluded from the life of the school, their responses turned to a discussion of how the vision of the school may not be understood by parents and students. ‘Simon’, ‘Louise’ and ‘Ross’ responded in turn:

The way the school goes about doing things, which may not meet parental expectation. They may have different expectations. That could lead to discord. Then they have to understand the ethos of the school and how the school does things.

Parents are coming from [the] old school. Parents come with an expectation of how it was when they were at school that is not how it is anymore.

You didn’t do they way we would have done it, we would have just canned the student. You have given the student a second chance at something. These so-called negatives are all relative to people’s perspective of what they think is wrong. If you address that, it must be good for the whole community. People might not go away totally satisfied, but at least they understand.

The significance of this is that it shows that the members of the focus group are aware that there are different discourses operating upon students within the school. For them, these competing discourses can be solved through understanding, and in this way any discord can be avoided or dealt with.

For these participants, promoting understanding of their role and expectations was crucial to help people to connect with the school as a whole. They felt that students’ experiences of connectedness could be improved by understanding what the role of the Church Council really was. Through this, they thought that the students would have a greater appreciation of how the school operates. In a sense, this was about making the role of Council transparent. When asked what things could be changes in the school to improve student connectedness, ‘Ross’ replied:

The first thing that comes to my mind is working with the parents and the senior students to help them understand the roles of the school administration and the council. The roles are vastly different. Maybe the school thinks the
council is a group of faceless people that meet every now and again just to decide how much they are going to charge us.

For ‘Simon’, what was crucial was that the students, staff and parents understood that what was significant was that there was a difference between “government and management”. For the purposes of this dissertation, ‘Simon’s’ acknowledgment of the way that government operates within a school is particularly insightful. This will be taken up in the Discussion Chapter.

When asked why connectedness was important, all participants of the focus group concurred that it was significant in creating membership of the community after school. This is best summed up by ‘Simon’, when he said:

*It is part of their life long learning, and if they are able to connect to their school community while they are within that community, that should then give them the ground work or sense of achievement in connecting there, to be able to connect in different communities, in different places, under different circumstances, with different people because they have been able to connect within the school community. There is a certain bonding there, that is part of what I think, the life long learning.*

The responses of the Council Focus Group have been summarised in the following table.

**Table 4 Summary of Council Responses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group Number</th>
<th>Responses Regarding Student Connectedness to Their School</th>
<th>Responses Regarding Student Disconnectedness to Their School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Council</td>
<td>• Friendliness of the whole community</td>
<td>• Rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students and staff respect each other</td>
<td>• The isolation of the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students working together to achieve a common goal</td>
<td>• The parents don’t understand how education has changed since they were at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Co-curricular</td>
<td>• The newness of the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The ability for students to create the culture and traditions of the new school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Tolerant staff and students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Opportunities for all students of all abilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Successes of the students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion to All Focus Groups

Overall, there were many areas of agreement from all of the stakeholder groups as to what students connected to at Church. All focus groups said that the small size of Church was a positive thing. They agreed that it fostered closer relationships between all members of the school community. It gave students opportunities that they may not have had in a larger school. The small size meant that each student’s contribution was more significant to the school community. However, it also meant that the students who did not fit the mould were more visible. This visibility often resulted in negative consequences, whether it was in the form of disciplinary action or peer group sanctions. The staff seemed concerned that the general ‘sameness’ of the students made them less tolerant of difference. The parents generally agreed with the staff, arguing that it was the opportunity for success that was important in the education of a child if they are going to grow to become connected to their wider community. The Council focus group felt that it was the friendly atmosphere of the school and the respect within the community that was significant in creating feelings of connectedness amongst the students.

Interestingly, the students tended to respond as was expected of their purposive sampling. The first focus group were the achievers, and they largely felt connected through their successes. They often felt disconnected, however, as a result of practices that they did not understand, or when they were treated as juveniles by the staff. The second focus group was made up of three students who were targeted as being quiet students. They tended to enjoy the relationships with staff and students as well as the feeling of being safe at school. However, the discourse of success that permeates much of the structure of schools they found unsettling. They liked the hierarchy when they were somewhere near the top, but disliked it when they were not. For them, school seemed to be a constant battle for status with students, staff and parents. The third focus group was selected as the students most involved in co-curricular activities. These students felt connected through their co-curricular activities, and enjoyed the sense of competition that they found in school. They accepted the hierarchy, and tended not to question their place in it. The fourth focus group was selected from students who have a troubled relationship with authority at schools. These students tended to be those who felt frustrated with the displacement of power
within the hierarchy, and questioned what it achieved. They battled with the feeling of being controlled, and often thought that the deployment of power was hypocritical. These points and others will be examined further in the next chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Discussion

To begin this discussion of the results, I would like to return to a point made in the first chapter. In no way are these results meant to be universally generalisable. Rather, they examine the shared and competing discourses on connectedness at one particular site. As such, the results are not meant to be used to define all issues of connectedness in all contexts. However, this information is really a beginning, a stepping stone to begin to examine how the discourses of connectedness operate within a specific school context. Another important consideration is that this dissertation is arguing that discourses of connectedness are located within the nexus of institutional power systems, and are maintained as a form of governmentality. What the participants really articulated through their responses was their experience of certain forms of institutional power.

The purpose of this dissertation was to look at how different stakeholder groups articulated discourses of student connectedness within the context of a specific school site. These discourses then, are significant because they exist within a fabric of power relationships. In a sense, discourse is what perpetuates the social basis of power within a specific institution or concept.\textsuperscript{111} Discourses are made up of discursive practices that “refer to the rules by which discourses are formed, rules that govern what can be said and what must remain unsaid, who can speak with authority and who can listen.”\textsuperscript{112} One of the key findings that has emerged from this study is that the students themselves are aware of the discursive practices that underpin the school as a social institution. They are aware of power being used and manipulated at all levels and by all groups within the school context. The students responded to this utilisation of power in varying ways, and with varying degrees of hostility and/or acceptance. In general, this could perhaps best be summarised as a contest between the desire to be

\textsuperscript{111} McLaren, \textit{Op Cit.} p.180
\textsuperscript{112} \textit{Ibid.}
treated as separate individuals and the desire to be a member of a community. A key area that emerged was to do with the student discourses concerning surveillance.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault wrote about Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon as an example of prison architecture that demonstrated the use of surveillance as a technique to make power “lighter, more rapid, more effective, a design of subtle coercion for a society to come.”\(^{113}\) As social institutions, schools utilise the practice of surveillance as a practice aimed at transforming the students so that they act in the “right” way. Students interviewed were only too aware that they were under surveillance, and resisted what they saw as a misuse of power. When ‘Odette’ was asked what she disliked about Church, her response focussed on how as a student she felt that her actions were continually under scrutiny from the staff, and that these actions were judged according to a morality that she may not have necessarily shared. She stated that:

> Teachers gossip about this kid and they all [do it], for instance in Year Nine or Ten and there was a party and all the teachers knew about it. You [the staff] have got nothing to do with it, we are out of school.

‘Penelope’ reinforced this when she said, with some resentment: “*There is a lot of interference from the teachers in our lives.*” This surveillance was not necessarily restricted to the staff. ‘Penelope’ also spoke about how the peer group worked to endorse or sanction particular behaviours: “*The fact is that if you do something everybody knows about it. Even if it is good or bad, there is no way of hiding it.*”

The students understood that they were under surveillance, and I believe that they resented this discursive practice of surveillance. I also believe that they resented it because it represented the use of power through the institution that served to separate individuals, to place them in a hierarchy according to how they were perceived by the staff and their peers. It is important to note that both ‘Penelope’ and ‘Odette’ were from the focus group identified as having experienced some authority problems in the past. For these students, their experience of surveillance could be a negative one. However, where the recognition was positive, it worked to make the same student feel

\(^{113}\) Foucault, *Discipline, Op Cit.* p.209
included. Later in the focus group, ‘Odette’ commented on how she perceived other people’s success would work to include them:

> What is really good and promotes community, if someone does something really good in this school, people find out about it. It encourages you to get involved because of the recognition.

It is interesting that ‘Odette’ speaks almost wistfully about the recognition other people get, rather than what she has received.

Student responses to the discursive practice of surveillance reflect the ambiguous nature of the deployment and manifestation of power within social contexts. For those students identified as being ‘successful’, their experience of being noticed was a positive one. However, the types of surveillance in operation were markedly different – these students tended to be being rewarded for behaviour or successes that the school appeared to endorse. ‘Sven’ liked the attention of being congratulated for his success. When asked what had allowed him to make a connection at Church, he replied: “Being congratulated for winning stuff. At other schools you didn’t get that, they would say: “Here you go, now sit down”. Here they clap and it makes you feel good.” Many other students spoke about how they enjoyed the recognition for their positive experiences, such as participation in a sporting team. What seems to be emerging through the students is a values dimension to connectedness. When the values discourses of the school and the student converge, there is a positive identification with the school as community. When these values discourses diverge, the students tend to feel isolated and alienated from the school as a community.

The responses of the students’ also tends to support the multiple facets of the deployment of power. Foucault wrote that the ordered nature of social institutions was significant in that it created the subject as an individual, and then removed his/her agency. “It allows both the characterisation of the individual as individual and the ordering of a given multiplicity.”

He also wrote:

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114 Ibid. p.149
The crowd, a compact mass, a locus of multiple exchanges, individualities merging together, a collective effect is abolished and replaced by a collection of separated individualities.\textsuperscript{115}

The importance of this position is that each individual within the system has a broad experience of the discursive practices that constitute power and deployment. Both ‘Penelope’ and ‘Odette’, whilst critical of the discursive practice of surveillance, responded to it positively when it rewarded them or endorsed their actions. Recognition in terms of either belonging to a Netball team or to the College Band were important factors in creating a feeling of connectedness to the school community.

As has been stated earlier, the concept of multiplicity of expressions of power is very important when we come to consider the discourses of student connectedness to school. The evidence gathered from these focus groups would seem to indicate that students connect and disconnect in multiple ways at multiple sites. It also seems to indicate that student experience is diverse and unique. If we take the discursive practice of surveillance as an example, it is possible for ‘Kathryn’ to feel alienated by the practice of pointing out mistakes made in assessments, as she felt both ridiculed and judged. An example of this is when she was asked what experiences had disconnected her. She replied: “Mr X, when we have tests, you do something really stupid, he says, ‘this is not Kathryn’s work, but I will tell you what she didn’t do’. [He] tells everyone the stupid thing you did.” However, the profile gained by ‘Kathryn’ as a member of various groups at Church makes her feel like a part of the community. This was demonstrated when she said: “Every year Target asks the band to play outside their Christmas Tree thing, that is good because nobody else gets asked, our small school gets asked.”

Furthermore, power is something that can connect the students to their schools, when it is something that they feel that they deploy and something over which they have some control. Many of the students wanted more interaction with younger students because it gave them a feeling of power and control, perhaps because they were mirroring the experience that they had of the hierarchical structure of power in

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid. p.201
schools. An example of this is a reply given by ‘Tarnie’ when asked what more Church could do to make her feel included. She wanted more time spent with younger students: “Another thing I like is on the bus, I get to look after all the little kids and tell them what to do. I get on the back seat and nobody else does. Having authority over them.” In this sense, the discourse of authority in terms of a hierarchical structure is very significant in the thinking of the students. Whilst they resist it when it is applied to them, they relish the opportunity to establish the hierarchical nature of authority over students that they feel are less powerful. In this way, formal practices of surveillance shift to the informal and help to reinforce the ‘appropriateness’ of surveillance in formal school settings. I believe that this explains why some of the students exhibited frustration at what they saw as an unfair application of power that discriminated against them. Two examples were the uniform policy and some of the seemingly minor privileges given to Year Twelves.

In the first focus group, ‘Engelbert’ was quite indignant about the uniform code as it applied to hair. He felt that it was enforced in an arbitrary manner, and when he was on the receiving end he felt victimised.

I got threatened because I had tips in my hair, I was told in no uncertain terms, “If you don’t get that cut out, you will be suspended”. Then I see people come to school with their whole hair dyed and nothing happens.

For ‘Penelope’, what she found frustrating was the fact that the Year Twelves got more privileges than she did. The privilege that really frustrated her was that they were allowed to eat their lunch in classrooms, but no other year was. She said:

The Year Twelves have privileges, but they make them feel separated and better and higher. It is making what we could have had, a relationship [is impossible], it is hindering us.

The use of power as it impact on the individual is significant. In situations like these, I argue that the deployment or non-deployment of authority acts as a barrier to connectedness when it upsets what students have been trained to see as the ‘proper’ functioning of the system – namely that of the hierarchy. It would appear that students are happy to wield power because it places them at the top of the hierarchy. However, when power places them in an inferior position, they resent its use, and this
resentment can have implications for how they connect to their school. In Chapter Two, one of the things argued for a school to be effective was that it needed to have a student representative council involved in making decisions. The analysis of student responses certainly seems to support this, because in a sense it breaks down the hierarchy based on age. This point was well-made by ‘Marcus’ who stated that:

> Even though there is good student contact with teachers, I would have a student council. Led by people who were not just [House] Captains because the Captains do have a lot of say.

This discursive practice has implications for how students connect to their schools. The notion of the social institution as hierarchical is very prevalent in the work of Foucault. Foucault argued that the deployment of power within social institutions often served to maintain the dominant ideologies of the ruling elites.\footnote{Ibid. p. 147} When discussing with each focus group their experiences of connectedness and/or alienation, there was one universal discourse that came from all groups – the importance of measurable success. This success was normally perceived as outside the realm of curriculum. It extended itself to sporting success and competition success where Church was in competition with other schools. There was no discussion of TEE results as something to compare. When asked what developed an allegiance to the school, ‘Engelbert’ commented on the success of members of the school community in getting accepted into the Sir Charles Court Young Leaders Program: “The three people that got into the Sir Charles Court from here, it is hard to get in and three of them got in.” The significance of this is that students at Church were perceived to have been judged as successes when compared to students in other school communities. This desire for success was given voice by many students through the co-curricular programme and these judgements of success can be seen as other examples of governmentality. The sport and cultural program of Church was enthusiastically received by all students, even prompting ‘Marcus’ to advocate making co-curricular activity compulsory for all students. For ‘Ricky’, it was this opportunity that made him feel a part of the community.

These students tended to continually measure success as a linear measurement of standing in comparison to others. This post-capitalist mentality of competition was
evident in all student focus groups, both inter- and intra-school. Success in the eyes of the students was a desirable commodity as it allowed them to express feelings of connection to their school in the guise of pride and solidarity with other students. ‘Sven’ articulated this when he spoke of the impact that the success of other students had on the rest of the school community: “We actually know the people that can win. In a big school you would not know them so you wouldn’t feel allegiance to them because you don’t know them.”

The problem with the push for success is that connectedness to the school can often only be measured by extrinsic factors that the school has little chance of controlling. The discourse of competition is one that has permeated all levels of community. There can be no doubt that the desire for success is a discourse that the students were very aware of. This discourse underpinned many of the student responses, it was one that had been successfully promulgated and with little apparent resistance. In the first focus group, ‘Monique’ focussed on success or failure of Church at Inter-School Carnivals as a reason for developing or not developing a positive connection with the school. However, the lack of success also meant that this was a site of alienation for many students. She stated that there was: “Not much [positive affiliation] at Inter-School because we get beaten at everything.”

As well as this, many students were acutely aware of what they had compared to other schools in terms of facilities, and saw Church as a very poor cousin. ‘Bruce’ commented on his experience of being judged because of where he went to school. He stated: “Out of school, you cop a lot, you get bagged out. Most of the schools have more [facilities] than Church.” For ‘Bruce’ and others, this often resulted in them being embarrassed at the relative lack of apparent success of Church in the eyes of the community. This embarrassment acted as a barrier for ‘Bruce’ to connect to his school communities.

The experiences of ‘Bruce’ and others tap into what I saw as a real need for the students to feel that they belonged to a community. As has been stated before, Foucault stated that one of the ways that society sought to maintain power was by

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117 One has only to look at texts such as Canadian philosopher John Raulston Saul; *The Unconscious Civilisation*, Penguin Books, London, 1997 to consider how pervasive the drive to succeed is in Western civilisations, often at the peril of the civilisation itself.
creating a “collection of separated individualities”. Where power is deployed in a postmodern society, individuality comes at the price of community. However, the students connected to, or wanted to connect to, the community of their school. The discourse of community was a strong one, however it was articulated and experienced differently by all of the students – recognition of the multiplicity of experience that Foucault commented on.

The discourse of community was created through many things. One of these was the need for the student to feel safe in their school. Another was the need to feel as if they belong. The students themselves were very cognisant of what happened to a person who was too different. ‘Tarnie’ spoke of her experience of watching and being involved in the treatment of someone who did not fit in.

‘Dorothy’ was just so different from everyone. I must admit none of us were all that nice to her. She was just so weird. None of us were ready to accept her. We were just so mean, in the end, she ended up leaving and we felt so mean. We could have been nicer to her.

Within the community, the student members wield a collective power that can be used to deny connection to students deemed unacceptable. However, this power that they wield also operates upon them, endorsing certain expectations and behaviours. This can extend to the discourse of success alienating students from the community. ‘Paris’ spoke about what it was like doing non-TEE subjects, and being judged because these were not seen as being as worthwhile as TEE subjects. Each of the students was acutely aware of where they were placed in each of the different hierarchies of the school. Those who were located near the top mentioned their success as a reason for them feeling part of the Church community. Those who were unhappy with their ‘place’ spoke of this as a source of frustration. An example of this is from ‘Tarnie’ when she says: “Some of the teachers, if you are near the bottom, they rub it in, they have their favourites. It is degrading.”

The third student focus group provided a powerful example of how the discourse of success is utilised to further the governmentality of society. This focus group specifically targeted those students that were engaged in multiple co-curricular activities at Church. The reason for this purposive sampling was that it was felt that

118 Foucault, Discipline, Op Cit. p.201
these students were among the most likely to be connected. The results certainly supported this conclusion. These students spoke of connection through the experience of competing, particularly when that corresponded with winning. When they were asked what they disliked about Church, they were silent for a long period until ‘Damien’ said: “I don’t see much wrong with it.” As a group, they judged the experience of connectedness of all people through their own experience, arguing that people who were excluded from the life of the school brought this upon themselves. ‘Ricky’ stated: “I would say [people are neglected] because they are not enquiring about helping or not trying harder.” In other words, students who feel alienated are probably to blame. These students have accepted the discourse of competition and success as natural and that it is ingrained in how they view other people’s experience. Not only this, their belief in the value of competition has resulted from their success, and they perpetuate this within their school community. This is best represented when ‘Damien’ says that to improve Church: “I would make extra-curricular activities compulsory. Everyone has to do at least one.” This demonstrates how technologies of domination can become technologies of the self, and in the process the individual becomes a member of the disciplinary society.

However, this governmentality through the deployment of hierarchical power was not as successful when students felt that they were dominated. An issue that many of the students had with the whole concept of community was that the definitions tended to be very different between stakeholder groups. In particular, the students felt that the concept of community of the staff was based on a hierarchical precept that they rejected. The fourth student focus group was quite adamant that the function of the staff was to act as a deterrent to the students engaging in a community. ‘Odette’ was one of those students.

There is a community feeling. If only the teachers would get over how much older than us they are. “We are getting paid to teach you so we are going to do it.” More like trying to get a connection with us.

What ‘Odette’ seems to take issue with is the concept of a hierarchical community where the staff are in a position above that of the students. For ‘Odette’ and the others, they envisaged a form of community based on equality, where the staff were on a similar level to the students themselves. In this sense, the operation of power
meets resistance from some students because of the hierarchical deployment of power that is considered formally appropriate in schools. The irony is that the hierarchical school is set up to control students, to create them as docile bodies. Student communities are a frightening prospect for many staff because they can exist outside the accepted deployment of power. ‘Penelope’ and other students took this further, arguing that there was a hierarchy within the student population as well, depending upon what year they were in and how their relationships with certain teachers was maintained. ‘Tarnie’ was indignant when her familiar and comfortable understanding of her accepted place within the hierarchy was challenged by other groups of students. When asked what she disliked, she said: “The stupid Year Tens. Even though we are older than them, they are so overpowering, those guys are so scary.” What ‘Tarnie’ disliked was that they challenged her understanding of where she existed within the power framework. Her response was not to reassess the worth of a hierarchical system, but rather to feel frustrated that these students did not accept their place within her understanding of the disciplinary society.

The last discourse that really emerged was the significance of the relationships of all members of the community: the students, the teachers, the parents and the Council. Perhaps the most surprising factor for me was the importance of the relationship between staff and students. Every single focus group nominated their relationship with teachers as being crucial in their connectedness to school. It did not matter which focus group was being interviewed, each of them said that one of the ways that they connected with their school was through teacher/student interaction.

In the first focus group, ‘Monique’ identified the relationship between staff and students as one of the things that she liked about Church. “It is better here because of the teacher student relationships you can build on with the teachers.” In the second focus group, ‘Paris’ argued a similar line to ‘Monique’ when asked what she liked about Church: “Some of the teachers, not all of them. Some of them are really friendly and you can talk to them and they offer support.” In the third focus group, ‘Ricky’ echoed the previous sentiments: “[T]he school is small so you generally get to bond more with the teachers than say at a larger school.” Perhaps the point is made most strongly by ‘Odette’ when she says: “Connection with the teacher is a big thing that gives you connection to the school.” It is difficult to place this relationship
context within the parameters of Foucault. It could be argued that these students are really just echoing a discourse that they have been continually exposed to, and they have become conditioned to accept the hierarchical relationship that both empowers and disempowers them in different ways at different times. Whilst to some extent I believe this is true for some students, I think that the process goes deeper than this. I would argue in this context a similar line to McLaren, who developed a position on critical theory that borrows much from the work of Foucault.119 McLaren goes on to argue that what teachers need to do is enable students to ask questions of their world, and when they do they receive students’ affection as a result.

Teaching and learning should be a process of inquiry, of critique: it should also be a process of constructing, of building a social imagination that works within a language of hope. An understanding of the language of the self can help us better negotiate the world.120

In this sense, the site of the classroom can very much be a force for transforming the lives of the students. When we look at the results of the student interview, what becomes clear is that the students at Church responded very much in this "language of hope". When I asked ‘Penelope’ why it was important to feel connected to her school community, she gave the following answer:

*You need a community feeling. It impacts so much on your life. You spend as much time here with the teachers and friends as we do with our family. Without community we become isolated and the world is an uglier place.*

However, it is also true that not all of the students felt that all teachers were capable or attempting to foster positive relationships with their students, once again acting as a barrier to student connectedness. The students also commented on the way that the staff and the Principal gave them the feeling that they were valued and important. This gave them a connection to the school. Even with the discourses that create the relationships within schools, there is a multiplicity of experience for each individual student. What can be seen through these responses is the way that the identity of students is shaped through their association through schools, and specifically, the ways in which they form connections. What these responses reveal to me is that connectedness is about power, how it is wielded, by whom, and the extent to which it is inclusive.

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119 McLaren *Op Cit.* p.180
There are four key areas in which focus group responses converged: experiences of and opportunities for success, relationships within and between groups, co-curricular experience, and the importance and relevance of a sense of common purpose. However, the experiences and expectations of each of the focus groups was markedly different. I would argue that underwriting each of these experiences of each of the participants is the problematic dynamic of power and governance within the school, as it is continually deployed, contested and reconfigured. As well as this, the ambiguous and multiple nature of connectedness and the concept of community means that there will be no final answers to the research questions. It is the critical questions that qualitative research raises that are most significant.

As has previously been discussed in this study, governmentality is the ways that institutions create a disciplinary society – the technologies of domination and the self operant on the individual. For the purposes of this dissertation, this can really be understood in those technologies deployed from above the student cohort, and those technologies deployed from within the student cohort. Discourses of connectedness are really a mirror of this governmentality, as we look at how connectedness is felt by the students to manifest itself within a student group, and how other groups believe it manifests itself. I believe that to harness the possibilities of connectedness, more time and thought needs to be given to creating a common awareness of how connectedness is being achieved, and why it is important.

The parent focus groups were made up of parents who were obviously determined to give their children the best education that they thought possible. What was really evident was that many of the parents were trying to understand the education that their children were receiving in terms of their own school experience. I would argue that what they thought that their children connected to was largely what they connected to at school, or more precisely, the ways that they remember their school experience. When they were asked what they thought that their children connected to, the dominant response was their close friendship groups. Interestingly, this was not something that many of the students identified as something that connected them to

120 *Ibid.* pp.189-190
their schools. Rather, the students tended to identify their feelings of acceptance amongst the wider peer group and counted this as a greater issue than acceptance within their immediate friendship group.

However, the parents did agree with the students about the importance of competition and success in the students identifying with their school. When asked about her son, ‘Mary’ wondered where his competitive streak came from.

_The other side of that, the successes that he has, that is part of his personality. I don’t know how he has this competitive streak but that comes out in his academic work as well as other things maybe school-based things that he has achieved._

As has been previously argued, the desire for success has been something that is endorsed by all levels of society, it is viewed as a positive so it is little wonder that students value success. This discourse of success is not only operant on the individual in the school community, it is also expected by the students of the school if it is to be worthy of allegiance. This is demonstrated by ‘Mary’ when she muses about how her son feels Church compares with other schools: “In [his] case there is a lack of facilities that he sees as a down side. The school isn’t very good because it doesn’t have these things. They are very tangible things.”

‘Mary’ went on to say that her child’s alienation from the school could occur because of how he perceived the wider community saw Church.

_They don’t mingle [his school friends and his out of school friends] because [he feels] one group wouldn’t mix with the other group and I think at times he can even be, he might even be embarrassed about being part of the Church group._

For ‘Mary’, she felt that this embarrassment was due to the values of her son’s school experience colliding with his out of school experience. ‘Eric’ felt that it was very difficult to connect to a school that is relatively new, that does not have the traditions associated with much older schools. However, like many other parents and students he nominated the co-curricular program as crucial in connecting students to their school community.
However, the parents did identify that the students were connected through the opportunities for success, and as a parent, ‘Joan’ thought that these opportunities are too often restricted to a select few, alienating those who were not given opportunities. She commented:

> You have to be aware to give everybody an opportunity, so that at the end of the day, everybody is given an opportunity then it is up to them what they do with it. I just don’t like to see the same kids picked for everything.

‘Joan’ was articulating an opposition to the discourse of success that she saw operating within the school. Within the year group, ‘Joan’ saw a hierarchy of students who were being given opportunity based on their place within that hierarchy. The questions that Joan is asking are powerful ones. By rewarding success, schools are really engaging in creating subjects required in a competitive society. In this sense, the use of the hierarchical structure prepares students for their role in a disciplinary society. The interesting thing is that Church is a school that prioritises a collaborative approach to learning – a style of learning that is meant to challenge the dominant hierarchical nature of learning.

One thing that all parents agreed on that was the importance of relationships between the staff and the students in helping their children connect to their schools. However, the parents focussed more on the negatives, on the times that their children felt alienated through their negative relationship with some teachers. With the exception of ‘David’, all of the parents did not list the role of the relationships between staff and students as being as crucial as the students did.

Both parent focus groups were also critical of how power was used within the school context. They felt that when power was used appropriately, and enforced fairly, what occurred was a creation of a community within the school. ‘Mary’ argued that when the uniform policy was enforced, solidarity amongst the students was one of the side effects. She said: “So the fact that they are constrained by society, they want to be a part of this but they want to sort of escape it, it created an almost automatic community.”
However, when this power was applied less universally, ‘David’ argued that it undermined any sense of community. He stated:

*Mixed messages like that really undermines everything you are trying to achieve. They are the little things that are very important, they can use that in their own way, anytime they want to point out discrepancies.*

Once again, the replies from the parents are given addressing issues of power and how it relates to the overall success of their children. In this response, it was argued that where power is disjointed or apparently unfair, it creates within itself isolated individualities. Without exception in this study, parents want their children to ‘belong’ to their schools. However, they felt that the inequitable use of power, or the ‘clumsy’ wielding of that power alienated their children from that which they should seek to belong – their school community.

The staff focus groups also agreed with the parents and students focus groups in a number of areas. They agreed that the co-curricular program was crucial in creating connectedness for those students who participated. They also felt that the relaxed, safe atmosphere of Church helped the students feel secure and valuable within the school community. As well, they felt the small size of the school enabled closer relationships to develop between the staff and students. Unlike other groups, the staff groups felt that what would really create connectedness to the school was academic success. For ‘Bob’ this meant that for the community when Church “gets academic [success] you get that image that Church is an acceptable place.”

However, like the other focus groups, discourses of student connectedness for the teachers were really discourses of power relationships. On the one hand, the teachers felt that there was power operating on the students within the school from such things as the Vision Statement and the rules of the school that entailed a set of expectations of the students. On the other hand, there were conflicting discourses coming from outside the school community that served to challenge the values that the school was trying to instil. This is best demonstrated by ‘Boris’, when he argued that these external discourses were about individualities rather than connection to a community. He said: “*I think it comes form the parents actually. They are mimicking what they hear at home. In discussions the parents very strongly back up [the] view of the*
student and you have nowhere to go.” When these discourses collide, the staff felt that the ability to work towards creating connectedness was seriously curtailed. As a result, they felt that much of what the school was about was perceived as being minor or petty to the students themselves. As ‘Boris’ said, the result was an “us and them” attitude. For ‘Sally’, the result was a frustrating spiral of power games:

There probably is a degree of the individualist community. Things like the boys in Year Eleven and Twelve being allowed to have their hair longer providing it is tied back, the new right that they are allowed, it is like [they] have to push it further. The rule might say that we have to have our hair tied back, but you know! They can’t see [that] with one [privilege] come further responsibilities.

These sentiments led staff such as ‘Bob’ to advocate a “stronger discipline system” because the implementation of such creates identity and community within itself.

There is also little doubt that the stakeholder groups articulated a range of diverging discourses towards what students connected to in their schools. To understand this, I believe that we need to consider the relationship that each of the stakeholder groups has with the institution of Church College. In effect, discourses of connectedness are informed by the prescribed relationships that each individual is expected to have with the school. The student responses generally reveal a close, personal relationship with the school, albeit a school that can alienate and frustrate the student. All students spoke of a desire to belong, and all spoke positively of times when they felt connected. The parents often saw their relationship with the school as a business relationship, imbued with memories of their own schooling. For this reason, they expected the schools to deliver a service that resulted in a successful, connected student. When it appeared that this was not happening, the parents tended to be critical of the staff, who they saw as agents of the business relationship. This point is clearly made by ‘David’ when he said: “That is fundamental. That is what school is all about. If you haven’t set up a good teacher/student relationship, it just puts up a barrier to learn.” In this sense, David believed that staff failed in their obligations where students felt disconnected. The staff, however, maintained that they could not do all that they were capable of because of what they perceived as a lack of support from many homes. This was evident when ‘Boris’ said: “I think it comes from the
parents actually [A strong sense of individual rights but little sense of community obligation]. They are mimicking what they hear at home.” The point that this demonstrates is that of the way that stakeholder attitudes and expectations are shaped by their relationship to power. I would argue that it is difficult for students to feel connected to their schools when there are obvious disagreements between some of the stakeholders as to how connectedness should be being developed.

However, when a common goal is clearly defined and worked towards, the results are very much shared by the whole community. In the form of traditions and rules, the teacher ‘Boris’ found that it was when they were relevant they worked. He stated: “[E]ven though they have only been going a short term, I think some of the kids are starting to see some of these being relevant rather than forced upon them.” I would argue that relevance is a key concept. Relevance means that the power relationships within the school can be explained, understood and accepted by all parties involved. In this sense, the deployment of power can create a form of community that is sustainable and compassionate, qualities that the Church Vision Statement aspires to work towards. In this sense, schools need to consider ways to make connectedness relevant, not just to students but to all stakeholders in a school community.

The Council focus group was a very different focus group than the others. The first thing that I noticed was that the participants seemed very removed from the students experience and adopted a far longer view than any other group. In the short-term, they felt that the students connected through the friendliness of the whole school community, and the various curricular and co-curricular opportunities offered. For example, Council member ‘Louise’ felt that it was very important that each student knew that they held a valuable place in the school community, because they were creating the culture of the school. She said: “There is a lot of effort by the whole staff, they will listen to what the students have to say and take on board what the feelings of students are on various issues.”

For Council member ‘Ross’, one of the central aspirations was that the school value each child and demonstrate a tolerance of difference. The chief discourse that this group seemed to hold was that it is only by valuing the individual that any sort of connection to the school community is possible. Unlike other groups, this group did
not seem to be aware of the power dimension of connectedness. I would argue that this was largely because they were quite removed from the school community as it operated day to day.

One of the significant research findings is that each of the groups, staff, parents and students, seem unsure as to how the power relationship could or should operate, and what is really important to each group. There is no doubt that each of the stakeholder groups want the students to connect to their schools, but they do not know how this should take place. All of the stakeholder groups also have a similar view of what the benefits of connectedness are. In a sense, what I see in this study is a problem of shared processes, of communication, and of a notion of a common purpose. Perhaps it goes back to the different answers to the question about the Vision Statement. No focus group seemed really sure what it meant, and what it would look like in practice. The responses were best summed up by the parent ‘Joan’, when she said: “You can’t even say it, let alone pull it apart.”

**Conclusion**

The conclusions for this dissertation are fairly straightforward. I think that this dissertation has acted as a preliminary piece of research, leaving more questions to be answered in later work. However, it has also unearthed some valuable information. The discourses of connectedness among the stakeholders are many and varied. The evidence gathered reflects this, with a wide range of things identified that students might connect to. These discourses depended upon the individual for their expression. For nearly all of the participants in the study, the issue of power was central to how they thought connectedness worked in a school situation. Primarily, this can be thought of as how the student responded to power as it was represented by different discursive practices. Some students resented the discourses operating within the school, other students welcomed various aspects. However, one thing is clear that whilst there were some similarities, there also existed marked differences between various stakeholders as to what they thought students connected to. All of the focus groups nominated co-curricular activities as a site of potential connectedness, yet the reasons that this was so were largely unarticulated.
This research has unearthed wider implications for schooling in Western Australia in the new millennium. Firstly, the issue of the size of the school is significant. One of the things that emerged from the research was that all of the stakeholders, including the students, nominated the small size of Church as a factor that promoted connectedness among the students. The students felt that this enabled them to develop close personal relationships with staff, as well as allowing them the opportunity to experience a variety of possibilities that they thought would disappear if the school was larger. It was important for the students that they were visible as individuals. The students felt that the small size allowed them to be significant to the culture and the community of the school. In short, they felt that in a small school what they contributed mattered. In Western Australia at the moment we are seeing schools grow larger and larger as education becomes increasingly dominated by economies of scale. This research suggests that larger schools are less likely to be sites of connection for many students. I would argue that this has ramifications for the success of the students being produced, and their impact on the wider community.

Secondly, education in Western Australia is about to undergo a systematic change in curriculum focus. The Curriculum Framework, mandated to be implemented in 2004, represents a number of shifts in emphasis. One of the most significant of these is the development of “a set of core shared values [that will] underpin the Curriculum Framework”.[121] This research has identified that the students have been shaped to understand their world in terms of a hierarchical structure that has as its organising principle the ways that power is maintained, accepted and deployed by certain groups at certain times. There can be no doubt that the push for ‘success’ articulated by many students, staff and parents is an example of a discourse that is used to create disciplinary subjects in what McLaren calls the post-capitalist world. The challenge for the new curriculum is how it is going to challenge these existing social values so that it is able to communicate the core values that I feel are essential in contemporary society.

Thirdly, I think that we need to reassess the ways that power is being deployed in schools as a means to allow students to feel more a part of their community. The

majority of student responses in this group cited concerns with the hierarchical structure of the school as the chief reason for experiences or instances of alienation. For the students, this did not just come from the staff, it also came from their peers and expectations placed on them from the wider society. However, schools need to evaluate how useful the existing authoritarian approach to pedagogy is. As well, schools need to develop strategies aimed at including students in the decision-making processes of the schools. I would argue that this is particularly true for issues involving discipline as well as classroom management. By doing this, schools can begin to soften the docility of bodies that is the norm for the education system in Western Australia. This will allow schools to move towards alleviating student frustration at the way that they are subjectified by the hierarchy of power, potentially allowing students the space to feel connected to their schools.

I think it would be useful to list what I see as important questions that could be discussed further.

1. What is the link between connectedness and learning?
2. What are the gender differences in experiences of connectedness?
3. What are some of the class or ethnic differences in experiences of connectedness?
4. How do stakeholder groups understand and deal with issues of power?
5. Lastly, are students who feel connected to their school communities able to transfer this to the wider community after school?

The dissertation was unashamedly student-centred. The reason for this was simple – students had the best understanding of what they connected to. Within the site of Church College, the data collected support the view that there were competing discourses of connectedness within the different stakeholders. There is also evidence to support the view that this resulted in some students feeling alienated from the expectations of the school.

In conclusion, I would like to restate the rationale of this dissertation. I argue that connectedness is important, largely because it is crucial in creating the types of communities that are needed to meet the challenges of the contemporary world. Whilst ideals such as justice and equality have become increasingly difficult to
develop in a postmodern society, I feel that notions of connectedness provide
opportunities to teach two very undervalued commodities, compassion and
understanding.

Finally, if we can return to a quote from Foucault, perhaps we may begin to
understand why his interrogation of social institutions such as schools is so important
for our students.

My role – and that is an emphatic word – is to show people that they are much
freer than they feel, that people accept as truth, as evidence, some themes that
have been built up at a certain moment during history, and this so-called
evidence can be criticised and destroyed.

What Foucault is talking about is about emancipating the individual, so that they can
belong comfortably to a community of their choosing. For students to feel
connectedness within their schools, the deployment of power needs to be considered
and understood by all stakeholder groups. It needs to be open and transparent, so that
within the school a unity of purpose can be achieved allowing each group to function
to the best of their ability, and as ‘Tarnie’ said, to allow the students to feel like they
belong.

You have a sense of belonging, it makes you feel good about yourself. It helps
your self-confidence knowing you are accepted at the college. You have good
friends and teachers. It makes you feel heaps better and you won’t degrade
yourself. It is what starts you off for everything else you do in life, so you need
to feel a part of it. That is what starts you off.
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Research Questions - Students

1) What do you like about “Church” College?

2) What do you dislike?

3) Do you feel part of a community at “Church” College? If so, what things do you think help you feel this?

4) What experiences have you had at “Church” College that have developed in you a sense of allegiance to the College?

5) What sort of connection have you made with “Church” College?
   (PROMPT: sports, clubs, staff, family inclusion)

6) The “Church” College Mission Statement reads that it is “…developing people of conscience who play a responsible role in creating sustainable compassionate communities”. How well do you think that “Church” does this?

7) Have you ever felt excluded or neglected from the life of the school? If yes, in what ways?

8) What things could be changes at “Church” College to help you feel more a part of the community at your school?
Research Questions - Parents

1. What do you think your child likes about “Church” College?

2. What do you think that they dislike?

3. Do you feel that your son or daughter feels part of a community at “Church” College? If so, what things do you think help them feel this?

4. What experiences have your children had at “Church” College that have developed in them a sense of allegiance to the College?

5. What sort of connection do your children have with “Church” College? (PROMPT: sports, clubs, staff, family inclusion)

6. The “Church” College Mission Statement reads that it is “…developing people of conscience who play a responsible role in creating sustainable compassionate communities”. How well do you think that “Church” does this?

7. Has your son or daughter ever felt excluded or neglected from the life of the school? If yes, in what ways?

8. What things could be changed at “Church” College to help your child feel more a part of the community at their school?
Research Questions – Staff

1. What do you think the students that you teach like about “Church” College?

2. What do you think that they dislike?

3. Do you think that your students feel part of a community at “Church” College? If so, what things do you think help them feel this?

4. What experiences do you think that students have at “Church” College that have developed in them a sense of allegiance to the College?

5. What sort of connection do your students have with “Church” College? (PROMPT: sports, clubs, staff, family inclusion)

6. The “Church” College Mission Statement reads that it is “…developing people of conscience who play a responsible role in creating sustainable compassionate communities”. How well do you think that “Church” does this?

7. Have you seen or had experiences of students being felt excluded or neglected from the life of the school? If yes, in what ways?

8. What things could be changed at “Church” College to help students feel more a part of the community at their school?
Research Questions – Council

1. What do you think the students like about “Church” College?

2. What do you think that they dislike?

3. Do you think that the students feel part of a community at “Church” College? If so, what things do you think help them feel this?

4. What experiences do you want students to have at “Church” College that will develop in them a sense of allegiance to the College?

5. What sort of connection do you think students have with “Church” College?
6. (PROMPT: sports, clubs, staff, family inclusion)

7. The “Church” College Mission Statement reads that it is “…developing people of conscience who play a responsible role in creating sustainable compassionate communities”. How well do you think that “Church” does this?

8. Have you seen or had experiences of students being felt excluded or neglected from the life of the school? If yes, in what ways?

9. What things could be changed at “Church” College to help students feel more a part of the community at their school?